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Method, methods and methodology: historical trends and current debates

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Introduction

Whether conceptualised as a disciplinary field (Richards and Rodgers, 2014) or a profession (Pennington and Hoekje, 2014), ELT is often characterized as being in "ferment" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), and subject to "fashions and trends" (Adamson, 2004); debates surrounding language teaching methods and methodology have been central to this perceived flux. Yet we are also in an era when unifying narratives and overarching explanations of intellectual and social developments "are viewed with suspicion" (Canagarajah, 2006: 9); in attempting to explain and understand the past, histories are always partial because they are informed by particular viewpoints and biases (ibid.). Consequently, there are a number of differing accounts of the recent history of methods in ELT, each with its own emphases, and each having implications for the way we might make sense of contemporary debates and practices within ELT. This chapter therefore aims to convey this range of perspectives on the development of methods in our field, narratives which, at times, diverge and offer conflicting accounts of the past and present.

All histories of methods involve an element of compromise – when to start, and what timescale to cover? With notable exceptions such as the longer histories of Howatt with Widdowson (2004) and Kelly (1969), most reviews have focused on the relatively brief period from the late 19th century to the present day, and this chapter too will review developments over this same period, the era when "language teaching came into its own" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 1). The chapter will review a number of perspectives, and will seek to address the 'short memory' of language teaching theory which often leads us to "ignore the past or distort its lessons" (Stern, 1983: 76-7).

First, however, the chapter explores key terminology.

'Method' and methods: an initial understanding

All professional communities of practice draw upon shared understandings of key concepts, as expressed through terminology. Yet 'Method', and the associated terms 'methods' and 'methodology', are used in variety of ways within ELT. This section will therefore explore what might be characterised as a standard understanding of method in our field; later in the chapter, however, this conception will be questioned and critiqued.

Central to traditional explanations of method is the relationship between theory and practice, Hinkel (2005: 631) suggesting that teaching methods are "theories translated into classroom applications … ideally, the purpose of a method for second language (L2) teaching is to connect the theories or research findings on how second languages are learned with how they can be taught". Stern thus notes that a method is "more than a single strategy or a particular technique; it is a 'theory' of language teaching" (1983: 452).

Anthony (1963) characterises the relationship between theory and practice within a three-tier hierarchy, in which 'method' occupies a central level between 'approach' and 'technique'. Here, 'approach' is a set of assumptions about the nature of language and language teaching and learning (in effect, the subject matter to be taught); 'method' is the plan for how to present language in an orderly way, which is based on and does not contradict the higher-order approach; and 'techniques' are specific classroom activities consistent with the method, and thus with the approach (ibid.). Techniques might include, for example, dialogue-building, translation exercises, and communicative tasks. Meanwhile, Richards and Rodgers (2014) draw upon Anthony's model to offer their own fuller account of method. They suggest that the overarching concept of 'method' comprises three elements, their 'approach' and 'procedure' broadly resembling Anthony's 'approach' and 'technique', now complemented by the additional notion of 'design' which includes: the objectives of a method; how the target language is selected and organised (i.e. its syllabus); types of teaching and learning activities; learner and teacher roles (including considerations such as learner-centredness and autonomy); and the role of any instructional materials in the method (p.29-35).

Bringing the various perspectives together, therefore, a method can be characterised by the perspectives it adopts on the following key concerns:

    a)   the nature of language
    b)   the nature of second language learning

c) goals and objectives in teaching

d) the type of syllabus to use

e) the role of teachers, learners and instructional materials

f) the activities, techniques and procedures to use.

<div align="right">(Richards and Schmidt, 2002: 330)</div>

Consequently, how has the distinction between 'method' and 'methodology' been conceptualised? At the broadest level, methodology is "the how of teaching" (Thornbury, 2011: 185), a "general word to describe classroom practices…irrespective of the particular method that a teacher is using" (Thornbury 2006: 131). For Waters, therefore, methods are " 'prescribed' ways of teaching", whilst methodology is "ways of teaching in general" (2012: 440). Meanwhile, Kumaravadivelu (2006: 84) suggests that:

> Method [refers to] established methods constructed by experts in the field…Methodology [is] what practicing teachers actually do in the classroom to achieve their stated or unstated teaching objectives.

Yet in practice, the method/methodology distinction is not always clear (Thornbury, 2011: 186). In their classroom practices (i.e. in their methodology), teachers are likely to either draw upon a single method, adopt a variety of elements taken from different methods which seem 'plausible' to them (Prabhu, 1990), or follow instructional materials in class which adhere to a particular method. In other words, 'methodology' often recycles 'big ideas' found in method (Thornbury, 2011: 186). It is this likely difference between methods 'in theory' and methodology 'in practice' which forms the basis for a sustained critique of the whole notion of 'method' which we shall explore later in the chapter. Now, however, the chapter will continue by examining how a current 'profusion of methods' has emerged over time in ELT, outlining the differing ways in which this history of methods has been characterized.

Methods, paradigms and change

A profusion of methods

Many accounts of methods suggest that, for over a century, "language educators sought to solve the problems of language teaching by focusing almost exclusively on Method" (Stern,

1983: 452; also, Allwright and Hanks, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Richards and Rodgers, 2014), as theorists and methodologists searched for the most effective method for English language teaching. (However, whether teachers followed or engaged in such debates is more open to question, as is the extent to which such discussions were recognised globally or were actually pre-occupations of a largely UK and USA-based methodological literature. We shall return to these points later in the chapter).

Consequently, by the early twenty-first century, a "profusion of competing methods" had emerged in ELT (Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 38). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), for example, identify eleven language teaching methods. Presented in sequence, these are: Grammar-translation; the Direct Method; the Audio-Lingual Method; the Silent Way, Desuggestopedia; Community Language Learning; Total Physical Response (TPR); Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Content-based Instruction (CBI, the North American term, also known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Europe);Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT); and a politically-oriented Participatory Approach. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson also discuss a number of further 'methodological innovations' (Learner Strategy Training; Cooperative Learning and Multiple Intelligences; and the uses of technology in language teaching and learning). Meanwhile, Richards and Rodgers (2014) examine a total of sixteen approaches and methods, a discussion which differs from Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) by exploring Grammar-translation and the Direct Method in significantly less depth, but by additionally examining in detail: the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching; Whole Language; Competency-based Teaching; Text-based Instruction; the Lexical Approach; and the Natural Approach. Significantly, although adopting an "essentially methods-based perspective" (Smith and Hunter, 2012: 430), the latter two texts also reflect upon the possible role of methods within a putative postmethod era (we shall reflect further on 'postmethod' later in the chapter). It is also interesting to note that, despite the excellent accounts within these texts, there is no 'definitive list' of methods across the methodological literature of ELT as a whole. This absence could, according to one's perspective, be the result of a fast-moving and ever-changing field; a lack of agreement and theoretical consistency about method and methods (Pennycook, 1989, a point to which we shall return); or quite simply, the practical constraints of word and page limit facing any author! (A detailed review of each of these methods is beyond the scope of this chapter; CLT (Thornbury), CLIL (Morton) and TBLT (Van den Branden) are discussed in detail in this Handbook, whilst further explorations can be found,

for example, in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), Richards and Rodgers (2014), and Allwright and Hanks (2009: 37-57)).

Paradigms and change over time

Most narratives exploring the development of methods tend to present them in a sequence reflecting their perceived emergence over time – the order of methods listed in the previous section is typical – and central to these accounts is the notion that methods have, over time, succeeded one another as 'paradigms' within the field. As "universally recognized achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners" (Kuhn, 1970/1996: x), paradigms are the fundamental underpinnings of what constitutes 'normal' or 'proper' theory and practice in any particular era. Once a paradigm is established, it defines the key questions and rationales of that era so strongly that it is almost impossible for those working within it to conceive of alternatives. However, once discoveries, anomalies or inconsistencies emerge which a paradigm cannot adequately explain, a 'revolution' takes place to resolve the 'crisis', leading to the replacement of one paradigm by another as existing orthodoxies are replaced (Thornbury, 2011). Thus, whilst change within a paradigm is gradual and developmental, a change of paradigm leads to rapid, radical and "tradition-shattering" transformation (Jacobs and Farrell, 2003: 3). Thinking in terms of paradigms, therefore, captures the notion of 'academic fashions' and offers one way of conceptualizing the development of ELT methods in the twentieth century.

A 'progressive' history of methods

Thus, a traditional view of the development of method over time is that "there has been a series of language teaching methods over the years, each being succeeded by a better one until we reach the present" (Pennycook, 1989: 597). This perspective suggests that developments in method have been progressive and cumulative, and language teaching has therefore become more effective as 'better' methods are developed. Rowlinson characterises this overview of methods as "continuous upwards progress through history" (1994: 7), with each method emerging as a result of the development and application of new paradigmatic ideas and the rejection of 'old' ideas.

From this perspective, language teaching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was dominated by Grammar-translation, which had emerged as an identifiable approach in the late eighteenth century. Based around ideas from the teaching of classical languages such as Latin, Grammar-translation required students to follow explicit grammatical rules in order to translate written sentences, and was criticised for, amongst other things, leaving learners unable to communicate in the target language (Weihua, 2004). Consequently, the early twentieth century Reform Movement advocated a Direct Method in which speech was primary, with a more prominent role for teaching pronunciation in class; there was a move away from isolated sentences and word lists to 'connected texts' from which grammar might be learned inductively; and an oral classroom methodology was implemented which included, for example, question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students, and the use of pictures, objects and actions to introduce and 'explain' new language (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004).

The move from Grammar-translation to the Direct Method is, within contemporary methodological accounts, often regarded as laying the foundations for subsequent developments in ELT, and is thus viewed as inherently 'progressive'. Hall and Cook (2012) suggest that, until recently, most subsequent methodological developments were founded on a monolingual assumption, derived directly from the rejection of Grammar-translation, which discouraged students from making use of their L1 (see also Kerr, this volume). (In fact, although translation of texts and sentences was rejected by strict proponents of the Direct Method, many Reform Movement teachers of the time actually continued to offer brief L1 'glosses' of occasional words and phrases (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 191-192)).

Yet the 'progress' offered by the Direct Method was accompanied by some methodological weaknesses which, in many accounts, are highlighted to explain its own subsequent decline in popularity. Its association with the practices of Berlitz schools (see, for example, Richards and Rodgers, 2014; but also, for a contested account of the Direct Method/Berlitz relationship, Hunter and Smith, 2012), led to criticism that its success was due to small class sizes, individual attention and intensive study (Brown, 2001: 22). Similarly, the argument goes, by placing teachers at the centre of classroom activity, the success of the method relied too heavily on teacher skill (ibid.). Finally, for some, the Direct Method lacked a clear grounding in theory and was the product of "enlightened amateurism" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 13). Indeed, the work of Reformers such as Henry Sweet, who looked to link

the practical study of languages (1899/1964) with methodological recommendations, provided a precursor to the development of applied linguistics as a discipline, which subsequently informed the development of many language teaching methods.

This narrative continues, therefore, with the emergence, in the 1940s, of Audiolingualism in the US, and the now arguably less well-known Situational Approach in the UK. In the development of Audiolingualism, Charles Fries' application of structuralism to language teaching (1945) provided a systematic description of language which had been missing from the Direct Method. Conceiving of language as a system of structurally related elements, such as phonemes, morphemes or words, which combine to create meaning through phrases, clauses, and sentences, instruction consequently relied on forms of learning such as memorization and drilling of sentence patterns. In Audiolingualism, therefore. learning took place via a process of stimulus-response-reinforcement and, incorporating principles from 'scientific' behavioural psychology (Skinner, 1957), was envisaged as 'good habit formation'. Within a 'progressive' narrative of methods, Audiolingualism heralds the time when ELT enters the 'applied linguistic' age, and many histories begin their detailed accounts of developments in method from this point (e.g. Allwright and Hanks, 2009; Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

The Oral Method and, subsequently, Situational language teaching are less often reviewed in contemporary methodological literature, but emerged in the UK from the work of, for example, Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby in the 1920s and 1930s (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004). The Oral Method emphasised the primacy of spoken language, with new language carefully selected (to ensure coverage of key vocabulary), graded (simple before complex forms) and presented; Situational Language Teaching is a particular oral approach, deployed in the 1950s and 1960s which, as its name suggests, presented and practised new language through 'situations'. Like Audiolingualism, the Situational Approach derived from a structural view of language and an implicitly behaviourist conception of learning, classrooms therefore featuring sentence pattern practice and drilling; indeed, we can see in Situational Language Teaching the antecedents of the still widely-deployed PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) lesson (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Emphasising our 'progressive' narrative, proponents of the Oral Method were very clear that it represented a break from and improvement on what had gone before, Pattison (1964: 4) noting that:

An oral approach should not be confused with the obsolete Direct Method, which meant only that the learner was bewildered by a flow of ungraded speech, suffering all the difficulties he [sic] would have encountered in picking up the language in its normal environment and losing most of the compensating benefits of better contextualization in those circumstances.

(cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 46)

Yet continuing the now established pattern, these methods were in turn attacked. From a theoretical perspective, advocates of generative grammar (e.g. Chomsky, 1966) suggested that language is a property of the human mind, and is not learned through behaviourist processes of habit formation. Additionally, pragmatic problems were identified such as a 'failure to deliver'; the emphasis on imitation rather than linguistic creativity, with associated issues of learner boredom; and the realisation that only relatively few learner errors are a result of L1 interference rather than developmental realisations of a learner's interlanguage. This latter point was significant to proponents of CLT, which emerged subsequently (Thornbury, 2011).

Prior to addressing CLT, however, most progressive accounts of ELT methods devote considerable time to a range of "unique and highly specific packages" (Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 44) which emerged at the end of the audiolingual era in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Usually described as 'humanistic approaches', or, reflecting their failure to become truly paradigmatic within the field, 'fringe' (Allwright and Hanks, 2009), 'designer/guru' (Bell, 2007) or 'alternative' (V. Cook, 2008) methods, they are one of two parallel, yet very different strands within ELT during this period (the other being CLT itself). Interestingly, although regularly discussed and critiqued within the methodological literature, they are often portrayed as being 'beyond' the overall progression of mainstream methods during the 20th century.

Based around their shared reaction against the 'science' of audiolingualism, typical accounts of humanistic approaches group together a number of methods in a way which often overlooks differences between them; such narratives therefore offer a 'methodological tidiness' which arguably did not exist in practice. Hence, the Silent Way (Gattegno, 1972), Community Language Learning (Curran, 1972) and Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 1978) aimed to 're-humanize' the classroom, drawing upon humanistic approaches to psychology (e.g.

Rogers, 1969) rather than applied linguistics. Such approaches emphasised: learners' personal growth and self-realization; respect for learners' own knowledge; recognition of the affective as well as cognitive nature of learning; and, consequently, the need to teach in a facilitative or enabling way which encourages learner self-discovery, independence and autonomy (Moscowitz, 1978; Stevick, 1980). Meanwhile, Total Physical Response (Asher, 1977) and the slightly later Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) emphasised, in differing ways, that exposure to the target language and to comprehensible input would lead to acquisition; language development would thus follow a predetermined 'natural' route. These two comprehension approaches (Winitz, 1981) draw upon Chomsky's (1966) suggestion that language knowledge is an innate human faculty which develops through exposure to input, rather than being learned through imitation as posited by the behaviourist approach of audiolingualism.

The "unusual demands" these methods placed on teachers or learners (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 313), such as the emphasis on the socio-emotional growth of individuals, are often cited as a reason why they did not become mainstream in ELT. Why, therefore, do they remain such a focus within the methodological literature? From a progressive perspective, their presence is less anomalous than it might first appear. Discussions of humanistic language teaching highlight perceived weaknesses in previous paradigmatic theory and practice, i.e., the difficulties surrounding audiolingualism. Furthermore, as most histories of methods note, it is clear that key notions such as learner-centredness, independence and autonomy, and a focus on affect in the classroom have subsequently become widespread within ELT. Discussions of humanistic methods therefore serve as a supporting step in the perceived cumulative development of current 'good practice'.

Arguably still portrayed as the most significant development within ELT over the last 50 years, the emergence of CLT in the 1960s and 1970s is generally regarded as a clear paradigmatic break with the past, indeed, as a 'communicative revolution' (Bolitho et al., 1983). As Thornbury documents (this volume), CLT emerged from a concern with language functions and notions, and the idea of 'communicative competence' – the knowledge of "when to speak, when not, and… what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner" (Hymes, 1972: 277). Thus, it is usually argued, key reactions to previous theory and practice were the "marked shift away from a concern for what language is (and the way it is

represented in the mind) to a concern for what language does (and the way it operates in the world)" (Thornbury, 2011: 188).

Following its emergence, CLT was portrayed as the dominant methodological paradigm within ELT in the late 20th Century. And yet, in the early 21st Century a unified vision of CLT has given way to an examination of 'strong' and 'weak' CLT, of whether CLT is appropriate for all contexts and cultures, and the development, or perhaps fragmentation, of CLT into related methods such as Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and content-oriented approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), both merging content and language-teaching in ways arguably similar to 'strong' forms of CLT (see Thornbury, Van den Branden, Morton respectively, this volume for fuller discussion). Such developments can be viewed in two very different ways. As a continuation of the progressive narrative outlined in this section, the emergence from CLT of something 'new' maintains a sense of cumulative development over time; problems within the dominant paradigm are identified, and subsequent emerging contemporary methods are a further step forward in the development of effective ELT. However, if, as argued in this chapter's introduction, unifying narratives of progress are now being questioned, then contemporary accounts of CLT methods which consider its strengths and weaknesses, examine the extent to which it is or is not appropriate in particular localized contexts, and reflect the variety of practices which are said to be underpinned by a broadly communicative approach reflect this more nuanced and cautious approach to historical developments in ELT. Richards and Rodgers exemplify this change in perspective over time. Summarising the position of CLT in their 2001 edition of 'Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching', they wrote:

> the general principles of Communicative Language Teaching are today widely accepted
> around the world (2001: 151)

Yet by 2014, in a revised edition of the same text, they recognised both the difficulties of CLT and, at a more general level, the need to recognise alternative perspectives on methods more generally:

> By the twenty-first century, the assumptions and practices of CLT seem on the one
> hand to be commonplace and part of a generally accepted and relatively uncontroversial
> canon of teaching theory and practice… On the other hand, language teaching today is

a much more localized activity, subject to the constraints and needs of particular contexts and cultures of learning, and the use of global and generic solutions to local problems is increasingly seen as problematic. Research and documentation of local practices is needed (2014: 107)

It is to these alternative perspectives and histories that we now turn.

Critiquing 'progress': methods as products of their times

The progressive narrative surrounding language teaching methods has been widely critiqued. In contrast to notions of cumulative improvements over time, longer-term histories of language teaching suggest that methodological developments are essentially cyclical. In his history of 2,500 years of language teaching, Kelly (1969) demonstrates that apparently recent innovations have very often been practised in earlier eras – oral communication, for example, was emphasised in the Classical and Renaissance periods, whilst language teaching in the Middle Ages and Enlightenment focused more on written texts (see also Pennycook, 1989). For Kelly, therefore, "nobody really knows what is new or what is old in present day language teaching procedures. There has been a vague feeling that modern experts have spent their time in discovering what other men [sic] have forgotten" (1969: ix). Consequently, Pennycook (1989) suggests that histories which portray the linear advancement of methods over time are 'ahistorical', whilst Smith and Hunter (2012: 430) refer somewhat acerbically, to notions of "self-proclaimed progress". From this perspective, developments in method are often likened to a pendulum which rejects then returns to key principles over time, before once again swinging away to supposedly 'new' alternatives.

Cyclical accounts generally suggest that, as the goals of language teaching change over time, so do language teaching methods:

Different approaches to teaching English did not occur by chance, but in response to changing geopolitical circumstances and social attitudes and values, as well as to shifts in fashions in linguistics (G. Cook, 2003: 30)

From this perspective, therefore, Grammar-translation was appropriate to the era before mass travel and international communication, when languages were learned by relatively few

people, often to develop the learners' intellectual abilities and enable literature to be read in the original language, rather than to facilitate communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Similarly, the emergence of the Direct Method in the early 20th century can be linked not only to an academic focus on speech and phonology, but also to a wider societal interest in 'natural learning' which was a reaction against the 'authoritarian' and 'traditional' teacher role said to underpin Grammar-translation (Crookes, 2009), and also to the advent of more widespread international travel and the associated need to communicate in foreign languages. Whilst the emergence of Audiolingualism can be linked to academic trends such as the rise of behavioural psychology and structuralism in linguistics, the need to teach foreign languages to many US serviceman towards the end of the Second World War prompted a focus on oral drills and conversation practice (known as the 'Army Method') which informed subsequent audiolingual methodology (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). And it is perhaps not surprising that 'humanistic' language teaching emerged from the social ferment of the 1960s, whilst CLT coincided not only with an intellectual focus on language functions and communication, but also during an era of mass travel and where the ability to communicate in English is increasingly seen as an essential skill for workers in many key sectors of many societies around the world.

The recognition that contextual factors play a fundamental role in the development and subsequent implementation of methods leads Adamson (2004: 605) to suggest that "no method is inherently superior to another; instead some methods are more appropriate than others in a particular context". From this perspective, therefore, methods reflect contemporary (rather than 'best') ideas and practices (ibid.).

Consequently, it is rare to find, within most contemporary overviews of ELT methods, clear or straightforward recommendations of one method over another; most aim to take account of the "complex, but not necessarily progressive" nature of their development (Crookes, 2009: 46). Thus, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson's wide-ranging overview of 'Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching' (i.e. methods) overtly states that the authors "do not seek to convince readers that one method is superior to another, or that there is or ever will be a perfect method" (2011: ix). Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014) discuss at some length, within their exploration of '*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*', how teachers themselves will need to interpret and implement methods and methodological decisions in their own contexts.

Methods as 'control': a critical narrative

Critical discussion within ELT has focused on the relationship between method and issues of power and control within the field. Drawing on the notion that all knowledge is 'interested' (Pennycook, 1989), that is, knowledge reflects a political perspective of how society should be organised, the concept of method is said to create and uphold a particular set of interests that favours some groups to the detriment of others.

We have already noted how traditional explanations of method suggest that methods are theories translated into practice, constructed by experts to be implemented by teachers in classrooms. Thus, a critical narrative suggests that the idea of Method, and the development of methods over time, has created and sustained power imbalances between (largely male) theorists and academics on the one hand, and (largely female) teachers in classrooms on the other. Consequently, Pennycook (1989) argues, the concept of method frustrates teachers who, in the 'real world', are unable to implement and follow methods fully and consistently. Method also values 'scientific' (i.e. applied linguistic) knowledge over contextual and local knowledges; from this perspective, teachers are 'de-skilled', becoming 'technicians' who merely implement other people's ideas. We shall return to these ideas shortly when discussing the emergence of 'postmethod' thinking in ELT.

Additionally, critical accounts also question the spread of methods around the world over time. For example, Holliday (1994), focusing in particular on CLT, questioned the extent to which methods emerging from, and reflecting assumptions and cultural norms in, dominant **B**ritish, **A**ustralasia and **N**orth **A**merican (BANA) contexts were appropriate in non-BANA contexts (see also Holliday, this volume). From this perspective, the dominance of the concept of 'method' within ELT has favoured BANA over non-BANA teaching practices as methods have been 'exported' (or even imposed) around the world, driven by the political and/or commercial imperatives of 'the centre' (i.e. the US, UK and other English-dominant countries), where most methods originated. Meanwhile Phillipson (1992) critiques what he sees as ELT's role in 'linguistic imperialism', in which a centre-to-periphery 'methods trade' has roots in colonialism and imperialism (see Pennycook, this volume). Here, then, the history of methods is seen not as a series of progressive developments over time which has led to more effective teaching and learning, nor as the consequence of shifts in social and

linguistic fashions; rather, methods have created and maintain specific patterns of power and control within ELT, favouring 'Western' 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to learning over non-Western and localized practices, as they are exported from 'the centre' to 'the periphery'. (Larsen-Freeman (2000), however, questions this perspective. Whilst agreeing that supposedly universal solutions which are culturally-insensitive or politically naïve are damaging, she suggests that, to consequently withhold methods from teachers outside BANA countries, or to assume they would be taken up unthinkingly and wholesale is to assume non-BANA teachers are "helpless victims" (p. 63) and disregard their agency in teaching/learning. Larsen-Freeman thus calls for judgements regarding the appropriacy of particular methods in particular contexts to be made by local educators.)

Challenging the narratives: the 'myth' of method?

Although apparently contrasting histories of ELT - 'progressive', 'cyclical/context-dependent' and critical - have been outlined in the discussion so far, all share a fundamental perspective – that a succession of methods can be identified and labelled across "bounded periods of history" (Hunter and Smith, 2012: 430). This view of methods and of ELT history has been critiqued in a number of ways.

Pennycook suggests, for example, that within ELT:

> First, there is little agreement as to which methods existed when, and in what order; second, there is little agreement and conceptual coherence to the terms used; and third, there is little evidence that methods ever reflected classroom reality. (1989: 602)

Hunter and Smith (2012) develop these points, arguing that a "mythology" has developed around methods, which has served to "package up", simplify and stereotype complex and contested past practices (430-431). For example, as we have seen, both progressive and context-oriented histories suggest that Grammar-translation was replaced by the Direct Method in the first half of the 20th Century. Yet it is evident that Grammar-translation is still used today in many parts of the world (furthermore, Hunter and Smith (ibid.) question whether a single label, Grammar-translation, can really be applied to the range of practices oriented around translation and explicit grammar teaching). Similarly, most descriptions of

the Direct Method suggest that translation was forbidden, yet this was not always the case in practice (or, indeed, in principle), as we have seen. Meanwhile, PPP-style teaching continues to flourish in many contexts, despite the supposed dominance of CLT and related content and task-based approaches. From this perspective, the conventional accounts of method and methods over the course of the twentieth century over-emphasise change and 'revolution', whilst overlooking methodological continuities and the locally-constituted nature of ELT practices (Smith, 2003).

Consequently, Hunter and Smith (2012) argue that such accounts prioritise the understandings and experiences of Anglo-American methodologists, and overlook the varied teaching traditions and experiences of English language teachers working in a near countless range of contexts around the world. From this perspective, the complexity of ELT classrooms, now and in the past, is overlooked by the "methods-based perspective on history which tends to dominate our profession" (p. 432). Indeed, Smith (2015) has subsequently suggested that 'bottom-up' accounts of 'good practice' may be more fruitful than top-down definitions imposed from external academic sources. Braine (2005) similarly argues that the voices of teachers, outlining English language teaching in their own particular contexts, can provide important perspectives on ELT from outside the UK, US and other English-dominant countries. Braine's edited collection of accounts from 15 countries (ibid.) including, for example, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, India, Lebanon, Singapore and Turkey, provides clear evidence of the complex relationship between social, political and other contextual factors and classroom teaching; the central place of textbooks in many contexts, with the continuing prevalence of drilling, translation and a focus on canonical English literature texts; and the challenges of implementing large-scale methodological change and development in ELT. Whilst methods and CLT are a point of reference in several chapters, it is clear that the experience of many teachers is far more complex than 'just' implementing a particular method in the classroom.

Thus, Pennycook (2004: 278) argues that the concept of method is intrinsically 'reductive', as it fails to describe adequately what really happens in language teaching and language classrooms.

Current debates: 'beyond method'?

The critiques outlined above have had a major impact within ELT since the early 1990s, and most writers in the field now explicitly recognise, to varying degrees, that "teachers are not mere conveyor belts delivering language through inflexible prescribed and proscribed behaviours" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011: xii-xiii), and that universal, standardized solutions which ignore local conditions, learner diversity and teacher agency cannot be found (Larsen-Freeman and Freeman, 2008). There is thus a strong current within the contemporary methodological literature of ELT of a "shift to localization" (Howatt with Widdowson, 2004: 369), in which pedagogical practices develop in response to local contexts and needs (Bax, 2003; Ur, 2013; Holliday, this volume).

But how might this recognition of the importance of local conditions and needs affect current perspectives on the continuing role or value of methods within ELT?

Methods as empowering options for teachers

Recognising the importance of local decision-making in developing context appropriate teaching, many writers now suggest that methods offer a range of possibilities which "empower teachers to respond meaningfully to particular classroom contexts" (Bell, 2007: 141-2). From this perspective, teachers need to be "well-versed in the pedagogical options available to meet the needs of the various ages, purposes proficiency levels, skills, and contexts of language learners around the globe" (Brown, 2001: xi), with Bell (2007) arguing that teachers are open to any method which helps them meet the challenges of their particular teaching context. (We can note here a change from the initial understanding of method outlined earlier in this chapter; teacher agency is now significantly foregrounded).

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011: xi-xii) thus suggest a number of ways in which knowledge of methods might be useful to teachers. Firstly, they argue, knowing about methods provides a "foil for reflection" which can help teachers become consciously aware of the thinking which underpins their current classroom practices. Secondly, as teachers become aware of what they do in the classroom and why they do it, they can choose to teach differently, making informed choices based on the range of possibilities available. Clearly, teachers may choose not to teach differently, or may face contextual constraints on what might be possible. However, knowledge of methods will facilitate a deeper understanding of possibilities in particular contexts. Additionally, a knowledge of methods can help expand a

teacher's range of classroom techniques and practices (Larsen and Anderson, ibid.), leading to further professional development. For Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, knowledge of methods does not de-skill teachers but can help teachers articulate and transform their practice, empowering them to make decisions about their own classroom and possibly even challenging the implementation of top-down educational policies. From this perspective, therefore, "methods can be studied not as prescriptions for how to teach but as a source of well-used practices, which teachers can adapt or implement based on their own needs" (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 16), and knowledge of methods acts as a potential source of teacher empowerment, acting via a process of 'principled eclecticism'.

Beyond methods? Towards postmethod pedagogy

A more radical response to the criticisms of method has been a more complete rejection of the concept as a basis for classroom teaching with many scholars now arguing that we have witnessed, or are witnessing, "the death of the method" (Allwright, 1991), or are moving "beyond methods" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; 2006; 2012) into a Postmethod Era characterized by "Postmethod Discourse" (Akbari, 2008).

Arguing for a shift in the way we understand teaching, its proponents argue that postmethod pedagogy attends not only to issues which we might readily identify with 'method' (for example, teaching, materials, curriculum and evaluation), but also to the range of historical, political and sociocultural experiences that influence language education. Kumaravadivelu (2003: 33) thus argues that postmethod is not an alternative method, but an alternative to method, which is thereby the product of bottom-up rather than top-down processes, signifies teacher autonomy, and draws on 'principled pragmatism' rather than 'principled eclecticism' (thus pedagogy is not constrained by teacher selections from conventional methods, but is shaped and reshaped by teacher self-observation, self-analysis and self-evaluation). Postmethod clearly draws on teachers' 'sense of plausibility' (Prabhu, 1990, and identified earlier in the chapter), and their subjective understandings of their own teaching and context arising from their own experience, professional education and peer consultation (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Consequently, according to Kumaravadivelu, Postmethod pedagogy builds on three key principles:

- Particularity, which requires pedagogy to be sensitive to the local individual, institutional, social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning and of teachers and learners

- Practicality, which breaks the hierarchical relationship between theorist and teacher as producers and consumers of knowledge; thus teachers are encouraged to theorize from their own practices, and put into practice their own theories

- Possibility, which fosters the socio-political consciousness of teachers and learners so they can "form and transform their personal and social identity".

(Kumaravadivelu 2012: 12-16)

Kumaravadivelu suggests that these principles should be operationalised through a series of macrostrategies which include, for example, maximizing learning opportunities; facilitating negotiated learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction; promoting learner autonomy; and fostering language awareness (see Kumaravadivelu, 2003 for fuller discussion; also note Larsen-Freeman's view (2005) that the principles and macrostrategies of Kumarivadivelu's postmethod pedagogy in fact qualify it as another method).

Challenges and concerns

Both the principled, eclectic implementation of existing methods and Postmethod's 'principled pragmatism' envisage an enhanced role for teachers in which they have both freedom and power to make decisions by drawing upon their own local and contextual expertise. Crookes (2009), however, suggests that we must recognise the constraints that most English teachers around the world are under. In general, teachers are not completely free to decide how they teach - they are constrained by school and ministry policies about what and how to teach; by learner, parent and peer expectations; and, more generally, by social convention. Akbari (2008) therefore warns against overlooking the complex realities of teachers' social, political and cultural lives, which may work against teacher autonomy and enhanced decision-making - teachers may not have the time, resources of inclination to take responsibility for methodological decisions in the ways outlined above. One further consequence of these debates, Akbari (ibid.) also suggests, is the possible replacement of methods by textbook-defined practice, which, like 'method', is seen to have the potential for deskilling teachers whilst also raising concerns over the representation of language and,

indeed, society and groups within society (for further discussion of these issues, see Gray, this volume).

Summary: a variety of perspectives

Whilst different approaches to teaching English can be identified over time (more within the methodological literature than in practice, perhaps), it is also clear that our ways of interpreting past and present developments in method are also changing. Thus, this chapter has briefly reviewed of a range of perspectives on the recent history of methods in ELT, noting a range of accounts which are all in some way 'partial'.

Recognizing the complexity, constraints and opportunities presented by local contexts and needs, many scholars have put aside notions of 'progress' and the search for a 'best method', whilst retaining a belief that methods still have an important role to play in teachers' decision-making, development and classroom practice. Others have rejected the notion of method more forcefully, arguing that teachers can be empowered through postmethod pedagogy. And others still have suggested that the construct of method is itself a reductive 'myth' which has distorted our view of both the history of ELT and of local teaching practices and traditions. From this perspective, the 'methods narrative' (or methods narratives) does not reflect the methodological and classroom realities of teachers and learners, both in the past and in contemporary ELT.

It is impossible to reconcile these differing perspectives on the historical trends and current debates which surround method and methods into a single narrative. Instead, "what we have now is not answers or solutions but a rich array of realizations and perspectives" (Canagarajah 2006:29) to help us understand and learn from the past in order to inform and explain contemporary methodological practices in ELT.

Discussion questions

- Which of the accounts of methods presented in this chapter seems most plausible to you? Do you think methods have progressively become 'better' over time, or do you think that they are simply 'products' of their time and context? Do you think that we, ELT professionals and researchers, focus too much on language teaching methods?

- A number of criticisms of the concept of method have been raised in this chapter. Which, if any, do you agree with, and why? If method is such a problematic concept, why does it continue to be such a powerful concept in ELT?
- Are you an 'eclectic' or 'pragmatic' teacher; do you 'mix and match' aspects from different methods in your teaching? If so, what principles or beliefs inform your decisions about what to do?

Related topics

Appropriate methodology; Communicative language teaching in theory and practice; Content and language integrated learning; Educational perspectives on ELT; ELT materials; Politics, power relationships and ELT; Questioning 'English-only' classrooms; Task-based language teaching.

Further reading

Howatt, A. with Widdowson, H. (2004) A History of English Language Teaching. Oxford: OUP. (A thorough history of English language teaching from CE 1400 onwards.)

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003) Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching. New Haven: Yale University Press. (A detailed framework for the design and implementation of postmethod teaching.)

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006) Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum. (An examination of methods and postmethod in ELT, from a postmethod perspective, which traces the putative move towards a post-method era.)

Larsen-Freeman, D. and Anderson, M. (2011) Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. 3rd Edition. Oxford: OUP. (An overview of a range of methods, giving clear insights into classroom practices and techniques.)

Richards, J. and Rodgers, T. (2014) Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. 3rd Edition. Oxford: OUP. (A systematic survey of a wide range of language teaching methods and approaches, looking at underlying principles and classroom practices.)

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