



The Postmethod Era: Towards New Teaching Approaches

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A Quick Overview

Changes in ELT have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency Ls need. They also reflect changes in theories of the nature of language and of LL

- 500 years ago Latin was a lingua franca, but in the 16th century French, Italian & English gained momentum as a result of political changes in Europe.



A Quick Overview

- Until the 18th century languages were taught using the same procedures used for Latin. In the 19th century Plötz, Ollendorf & Meidinger proposed GTM (1840-1940).
- In the mid 19th century increased opportunities for communication among Europeans created a demand for oral proficiency.



A Quick Overview

- Marcel, Prendergast, Gouin & others chose a more naturalistic approach to LL. (SM)
- The Reform Movement with Sweet, Vietor, Passy founded the International Phonetic Association (1886) & proposed phonetics as the base for LL. They also wrote academic articles and came up with the IP Alphabet



A Quick Overview

- Sauveur & others applied natural principles to LL & created the DM which was popular in private schools but never succeeded in public ones.
- The Coleman Report (1929) recommended a reading-based approach, but WWII with the Army Specialized Training Program (1942) changed it all and produced the ALM



A Quick Overview

- Wilkins (1976) proposed different types of syllabi & Savignon (1972) advanced the concept of CLT.
- Chomsky discusses Plato's problem
- Alternative approaches (TSW, CLL, TPR) dominated the 1970s.
- Kumaravadivelu (late 90s): we have moved to the postmethod condition freeing us from the constraints of methods and giving us new options.



The Postmethod Era

- Block (2001): While method has been discredited at an *etic* level (i.e. in the thinking of scholars) it retains a great deal of vitality at the *emic* level (i.e., it is still part of the nomenclature of lay people and teachers)



Three Definitions

- Smorgasbord of ideas: **m**ethods include programs, curricula, procedures, demonstrations, modes of presentation, research findings, tests, manners of interaction , materials, texts, films, videos, computers and more. How can Ts make something coherent out of this?



Three Definitions

- Prescription for practice: **M**ethods are fixed sets of classroom practices that serve as a prescription and therefore do not allow variation. For Kumaravadivelu (1994) they are a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers. This leads us to abandoning methods.



Three Definitions

- Organizing principles: Richards & Rodgers (2001) describe **M**ethods as an umbrella term comprising approach, design, and procedure. Post-method advocates focus on the two first definitions when they propose abandoning methods in general.

What definition would you adopt in your professional practice?

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Misconceptions

People against methods affirm that:

- Methods are universally applicable in their purest form.
- Methods are prescriptive and Ts cannot include their own ideas.
- Methods ignore current theories

But...Most teachers (informed ones) disagree with these ideas about methods.



Conclusions

- **Methods are not dead, nor will they ever be.**

Post-method does not imply the end of methods, but an understanding of the limitations of the “primitive” notions of methods and a desire to transcend these limitations



Conclusions

- CLT is a paradigm that should be understood as a construction of socioeconomic, cultural and ideological forces. As those forces shift, so will methods.



Conclusions

- Method and Post-method are dialectical forces: The first imposing methodological coherence, the other deconstructing the totalizing tendency of method from the perspective of local demands: **method and postmethod together can liberate our practices**



Workshop

In pairs or groups of three brainstorm about why L2 teachers need methods. Be ready to share your answers with the group



Why do we need methods?

- To learn how to use different A & M and understand when they might be useful
- To understand some issues and controversies that characterize the history of LT.
- To participate in language learning experiences based on different A & M as a basis for reflection and comparison.
- To identify the reach set of activity resources available to the imaginative teacher



Why do we need methods?

- To appreciate how theory and practice can be linked from different perspectives.

However...

Ts and novice Ts must use A & M flexibly and creatively based on judgment and experience. In developing a personal approach you must consider your beliefs on:

T's role in the classroom

The nature of effective teaching and learning

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Why do we need methods?

- The difficulties Ls face and how these can be addressed.
- Successful learning activities
- The structure of an effective lesson

No matter what method(s) or approach(es) you use, some principles are always applicable:



Some principles...

- Engage all learners in the lesson
- Make Ls, not the T the focus of the lesson
- Provide maximum opportunities for student participation and S-S activities
- Develop learner responsibility and develop Ls' confidence
- Be tolerant of Ls' mistakes
- Teach learning strategies
- Respond to Ls' difficulties and build on them