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 **HELP & FAQs**

Then and Now: 30 Years of TEFL/TESL

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Looking back over the last 30 years at the influences that have shaped my own thinking and professional practice and reflecting on the current “state of the art” in language teaching prompted me to ask three basic questions:

1. What are some of the key questions we have been concerned about in language teaching?
2. What did we believe and understand about these issues thirty years ago?
3. What do we believe and understand about them now?

To explore these questions I made use of information obtained from my recent writing activities (see Richards & Schmidt 2002; Richards & Renandya 2002; Richards & Rodgers 2001) and also examined all the issues of two important professional journals in language teaching—*English Language Teaching Journal* and *English Teaching Forum*—for the years 1970-1975 and 1995-2000. In reviewing these journals I sought to identify the issues that were most frequently written about during the two time periods. This paper presents the results of these activities and explores the following eight questions:

- What are the goals of teaching English?
- What is the best way to teach a language?
- What is the role of grammar in language teaching?
- What processes are involved in second language learning?
- What is the role of the learner?
- How can we teach the four skills?
- How can we assess students’ learning?
- How can we prepare language teachers?

In examining these questions I will try to show how our understanding of each issue changed over the last 30 years and what current beliefs and practices in relation to each issue are. In the process we will also see hints of the transition from *modernism* (i.e., the rejection of prescription, authority, untested claims and assertions in favor of reason, empirical investigation and objectivity closely associated with the *scientific method*) to *postmodernism* (i.e., the

rejection of modernism for failing to recognize the cultural relativity of all forms of knowledge, an emphasis on the autonomous individual, and the adoption of amoral stance against all forms of injustice). I will also highlight some of the most important terminology that is used in contemporary professional discourse about each issue.

What are the goals of teaching English?

Purposes for learning English

Today English is so widely taught worldwide that the purposes for which it is learned are sometimes taken for granted. 30 years ago the assumption was that teaching English was a politically neutral activity and acquiring it would bring untold blessings to those who succeeded in learning it. It would lead to educational and economic *empowerment*. English was regarded as the property of the English-speaking world, particularly Britain and the US. Native-speakers of the language had special insights and superior knowledge about teaching it. And it was above all the vehicle for the expression of a rich and advanced culture or cultures, whose literary artifacts had universal value.

English as an international language

This picture has changed somewhat today. Now that English is the language of globalization, international communication, commerce and trade, and media and pop culture, different motivations for learning it come into play. English is no longer viewed as the property of the English-speaking world but is an international commodity sometimes referred to as *World English* or *English as an International Language*. The cultural values of Britain and the US are often seen as irrelevant to language teaching, except in situations where the learner has

a pragmatic need for such information. The language teacher need no longer be an expert on British and American culture and a literature specialist as well.

English is still promoted as a tool that will assist with educational and economic advancement but is viewed in many parts of the world as one that can be acquired without any of the cultural trappings that go with it. Proficiency in English is needed for employees to advance in international companies and improve their technical knowledge and skills. It provides a foundation for what has been called “process skills” – those problem-solving and critical-thinking skills that are needed to cope with the rapidly changing environment of the workplace, one where English is play a growingly important role.

The role of the native speaker

In the 70s the target for learning was assumed to be a native-speaker variety of English and it was the native speaker’s culture, perceptions, and speech that were crucial in setting goals for English teaching. The native speaker had a privileged status as “owners of the language, guardians of its standards, and arbiters of acceptable pedagogic norms”(Jenkins 2000, p. 5). Today *local varieties* of English such as Filipino English and Singapore English are firmly established as a result of *indigenization*, and in contexts where English is a foreign language there is less pressure to turn foreign-language speakers of English (e.g., Koreans, Taiwanese, or Japanese) into mimics of native speaker English, be it an American, British, or Australian variety. The extent that a learner seeks to speak with a native-like accent and sets this as his or her goal is a personal one.

Critical perspectives

The messages of *critical theory* and *critical pedagogy* have also prompted reflection on the *hidden curriculum* that sometimes underlies language teaching policies and practices. *Critical theorists* have turned their attention to the status of English and the drain on education resources it demands in many countries and its role in facilitating the domination of multinational corporations. Teachers are now encouraged to examine and confront the underlying *ideologies* of texts and textbooks. In practice however in many parts of the world this has meant little more than standards of *political correctness* being applied to the content of textbooks. McCarthy (2001, p.132) writing about *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) has pointed out that “there is a whiff of political correctness in much of what CDA presents, and a middle-class left-wing bias and academic elitism which is often thinly disguised behind the unquestioned caring for minorities and the oppressed which CDA practitioners sincerely possess.”

Then:

- Teachers seen as cultural informants.
- Literature an important dimension of language learning.
- Native-speaker accent the target.
- Native-speaker-like fluency the target.

Now:

- English a world commodity.
- English teaching linked to national values.
- Mother tongue influenced accent acceptable.
- Comprehensibility the target.

What is the best way to teach a language?

The decline of methods

The 70s ushered in an era of change and innovation in language teaching methodology. This was the decade during which *Communicative Language Teaching* came to replace *Audiolingualism* and the *Structural-Situational Approach*. And it was during this decade that we heard about such novel methods as *Total Physical Response*, *The Silent Way*, and *Counseling Learning*. Improvements in language teaching would come about through the adoption of new and improved teaching approaches and methods that incorporated breakthroughs in our understanding of language and how language learning takes place.

Many of the more innovative methods of the 70s had a very short shelf life (Richards and Rodgers 2001). Because they were linked to very specific claims and to prescribed practices, they tended to fall out of favor as these practices became unfashionable or discredited. The heyday of methods can be considered to have lasted until the late 80s. One of the strongest criticisms of the “new methods” was that they were typically “top-down.” Teachers had to accept on faith the claims or theory underlying the method and apply them in their own practice. Good teaching was regarded as correct use of the method and its prescribed principles and techniques. Roles of teachers and learners as well as the type of activities and teaching techniques to be used in the classroom, were generally prescribed. Likewise, learners were often viewed as the passive recipients of the method who should submit themselves to its regime of exercises and activities.

Communicative approaches

Because it refers to a diverse set of rather general and uncontroversial principles *Communicative Language Teaching* can be interpreted in many different ways and used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures. The principles themselves can be summarized as follows:

- The goal of language learning is communicative competence.
- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency and accuracy are both important dimensions of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- Learning is a gradual process that involves trial and error.

Several contemporary teaching approaches such as *Content Based Instruction*, *Cooperative Language Learning*, and *Task-Based Instruction* can all claim to be applications of these principles and hence continue today.

In the last thirty years there has also been a substantial change in where and how learning takes place. In the 70s teaching mainly took place in the classroom and in the language laboratory. The teacher used chalk, talk and the textbook. Technology amounted to the tape recorder and filmstrips. However towards the end of the 70s learning began to move away from the teacher's direct control and into the hands of learners through the use of *individualized learning*, group and project work.

Context and resources

The contexts and resources for learning have also seen many changes since the 70s. Learning is not confined to the classroom: it can take place at home or in other places as well as at school, using the computer and other forms of technology. Today's teachers and learners live in a technology-enhanced learning environment. Videos, computers and the Internet are accessible to almost all teachers and learners and in *smart schools* the language laboratory has been turned into a *multimedia center* that supports *on-line learning*. Technology has facilitated the shift from *teacher-centered* to *learner-centered* learning. Students now spend time interacting not with the teacher, but with other learners using *chat rooms* that provide access to more authentic input and learning processes and that make language learning available at any time.

On the pedagogical side teachers are no longer viewed merely as skilled implementers of a teaching method but as creators of their own individual teaching methods, as classroom researchers, and curriculum and materials developers. Beyond the pedagogical level however and at the level of the institution, schools are increasingly viewed as having similar characteristics to other kinds of complex organizations in terms of organizational activities and processes and can be studied as a system involving inputs, processes, and outputs. Teaching is embedded within an organizational and administrative context and influenced by organizational constraints and processes. We have thus seen a movement away from an obsession with pedagogical processes to a focus on organizational systems and processes and their contribution to successful language programs (Richards 2001).

Then:

- Methods seen as the key to successful language teaching.
- Top-down approaches to teaching.
- Prescriptive teaching.
- Schools and institutions still installing language labs.

Now:

- Post-methods era.
- Bottom-up communicative approaches.
- Exploratory and reflective approaches to teaching.
- Language lab converted to a multimedia center.

What is the role of grammar in language teaching?

In the 70s we were just nearing the end of a period during which grammar had a controlling influence on language teaching. Approaches to grammar teaching and the design of course books at that time reflected a view of language that saw the sentence and sentence grammar as forming the building blocks of language, language learning, and language use (McCarthy 2001). But in the 70s Chomsky's (1965) theories of language and his distinction between *competence* and *performance* were starting to have an impact on language teaching. His theory of "transformational grammar" for example, with core kernel sentences that were transformed through the operation of rules to produce more complex sentences sought to capture the nature of a speaker's *linguistic competence*. Gradually throughout the seventies the sentence as the central unit of focus became replaced by a focus on language in use with the emergence of the notion of *communicative competence*.

The development of communicative methodologies to replace the grammar-based methodologies of the 70s also resulted in a succession of experiments with different kinds of syllabuses (e.g. *notional*, *functional*, and *content based*) and an emphasis on both *accuracy* and *fluency* as goals for learning and teaching. However the implementation of communicative and fluency-based methodology did not resolve the issue of what to do about grammar. The promise that the communicative methodologies would help learners develop both communicative competence as well as linguistic competence did not always happen. To address this problem it was argued that classroom activities should provide opportunities for the following processes to take place (Ellis 2002):

1. *Noticing*
2. *Comparing*
3. *Integrating or restructuring*

Proposals as to how these processes can be realized within the framework of current communicative methodologies include:

- Incorporating a more explicit treatment of grammar within a text-based curriculum.
- Building a *focus on form* into task-based teaching through activities centering on consciousness raising or noticing grammatical features of input or output.

Then:

- Sentence grammar the focus of teaching.
- Linguistic competence the goal of learning.
- Grammar often taught divorced from context.
- Accuracy-based methodology.

Now:

- Accuracy and fluency of equal status.
- Grammar taught in meaningful context through tasks.
- Focus on grammar in discourse and texts.
- Communicative competence the goal of learning.

What processes are involved in second language learning?

In the early 70s Chomsky rejected behaviorism as inapplicable to language learning and emphasized the cognitive nature of language learning. Exposure to language was sufficient to trigger the acquisition processes and initiate the processes of hypothesis formation that were evident in studies of language acquisition.

Second language acquisition

These ideas generated a great deal of interest in applied linguistics and led to the fields of *error analysis* and *second language acquisition* or *SLA* which sought to find other explanations for second language learning than habit formation. Error analysis argued that learners errors were systematic, not always derived from the mother tongue, and represented a developing linguistic system or *interlanguage*. Gradually a view emerged of the learner as actively and creatively involved in developing his or her interlanguage. This view proposed that learners make use of processes leading to the creation of novel forms and structures that are not found in the target language, using natural processes such as generalization. By the 1990s however error analysis had been replaced by further developments in Chomskyan theory. Chomsky's theory of universal grammar had been elaborated to include innate

knowledge about the *principles* of language (i.e., that languages usually have pronouns) and their *parameters* (i.e., that some languages allow these to be dropped when they are in subject position) and this model was applied to the study of both first and second language acquisition (Schmitt 2002).

Information-processing models

Other dimensions to second language learning were explained by reference to *information processing* models of learning. Two different kinds of processing are distinguished in this model. *Controlled processing* is involved when conscious attention is required to perform a task. This places demands on *short-term memory*. *Automatic processing* is involved when the learner carries out a task without awareness or attention, making more use of information in *long-term memory*. Learning involves the performance of behavior with automatic processing. The information processing model offered an explanation as to why learners language use sometimes shifts from fluent (automatic processing) to less fluent (controlled processing) and why learners in the initial stages of language learning need to put so much effort into understanding and producing language (Spada and Lightbown 2002).

Vygotskyan theory

Learning through interaction came to be seen as both a social process as well as a cognitive one. Some SLA researchers drew on Vygotsky's (1986) view of the *zone of proximal development*, which focuses on the gap between what the learner can currently do and the next stage in learning – the *level of potential development* - and how learning occurs through negotiation between the learner and a more advanced language user during which a process known as *scaffolding* occurs. To take part in these processes the learner must develop

interactional competence, the ability to manage exchanges despite limited language development.

Despite social and cognitive theoretical advances, SLA theory throughout the 90s still tended to reflect a grammar-based view of language, with an interest in explaining how learners built up knowledge of “rules” of the target language. Recently this view of learning has been questioned by those favoring *connectionism*, which explains learning not in terms of abstract rule or universal grammar but in terms of “probabilistic or associative models of acquisition, rather than symbolic rule-based models” (McCarthy 2001; p. 83). Hence SLA theory today remains strongly influenced by a Chomskyan view of language and limits its focus to oral language and the acquisition of grammatical competence. For this reason it is considered to be largely irrelevant in understanding the learning of other aspects of language such as reading, writing or listening (see Grabe 2002).

Then:

- Emergence of error analysis and SLA.
- Cognitive views of learning replace behaviorist theory.
- Interlanguage concept proposed.
- Developments sequences described.

Now:

- Interactionist model of learning.
- Learning through scaffolding.
- Probabilistic models of learning proposed.

What is the role of the learner?

In the last thirty years learners have come to assume a much more significant role in the language learning process from their contribution in the early 70s. In the 70s we tended to assume that learners were very much alike in their reasons for wanting to learn English as well as the ways in which they learn a language. But then a rethinking of the learner’s contribution began in earnest.

The role of motivation

One interest that emerged at this time was the role of motivation in language learning. Two early motivational orientations that were identified were *instrumental motivation* (e.g. wanting to learn a language for the practical benefits it brings) and *integrative motivation* (e.g. wanting to learn a language in order to interact with and become similar to valued members of the target language community). Another distinction that appeared was the distinction between *intrinsic motivation* (i.e., enjoyment of language learning itself) and *extrinsic motivation* (i.e., driven by external factors such as parental pressure, societal expectations, academic requirements or other sources of rewards or punishment). The construct of motivation emphasized the importance of *individual differences* among learners (which also include *language aptitude*, age, and gender), the learner’s role in determining the goals of language learning and the kind of effort he or she might commit to it, and the need to find ways of creating motivational conditions in the classroom.

Individualization

A different strand to the focus on the learner theme emerged at the same time under the rubric of *individualized instruction* and more generally, *individualization*. Individualized approaches to language teaching are based on the assumptions that:

- People learn in different ways.
- They can learn from a variety of different sources.
- Learners have different goals and objectives in language learning.
- Direct teaching by a teacher is not always essential for learning.

Individualization includes such things as one-to-one teaching, home study, *self-access learning*, self-directed learning, and the movement towards *learner autonomy*, all of which focus on the learner as an individual and seek to encourage learner initiative and to respect learner differences. In the 80s it was replaced by the term *learner-centeredness*, which refers to the belief that attention to the nature of learners should be central to all aspects of language teaching, including planning teaching and evaluation.

In learner-centered approaches, course design and teaching often become negotiated processes through *needs analysis*, since needs, expectations, and student resources vary with each group of learners. This was the approach used in the Australian Migrant Education program and described in Nunan's (1988) book *The Learner Centered Curriculum*.

Learning strategies

In the 80s, interest in learner differences also led to the emergence of *learner strategy* research, an issue that received considerable attention into the 90s. Strategies first came to attention with studies of the *good language learner* in the mid 70s and the idea that

when we teach a language we also have to teach language-learning strategies and acknowledge different *cognitive styles*.

Some strategies are more likely to be effective than others and by distinguishing between the strategies of experts and novices or good language learners versus poor learners we can improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning. *Strategy training* and the notion of strategies still continue to attract attention, though not perhaps with the same level of enthusiasm that they did a decade ago since many teachers feel that strategies are hard to identify, sometimes differ from learner to learner, and are often difficult to address in teaching.

Then:

- Teacher-centered teaching.
- Uniform view of learners.
- Role of motivation examined.
- Individual differences emphasized.

Now:

- Learner-centered teaching.
- Diversity a strength.
- Emphasis on individual difference.
- Training of learner strategies.

How can we teach the four skills?

Teaching listening

Listening, hardly mentioned at all in journals in the 70s, has come into its own by the present period and although it continues to be ignored in SLA theory and research at least in teaching it now plays a much more prominent role. University

entrance exams, school leaving and other examinations have begun to include a listening component, acknowledging that listening proficiency is an important aspect of second language proficiency, and if it is not tested, teachers will not pay attention to it. An early view of listening saw it as the mastery of discrete skills or *microskills* (e.g. Richards 1983) and these should form the focus of teaching and testing. A skills approach focused on such things as (Rost 1990):

- Discriminating sounds in words, especially phonemic contrasts.
- Deducing the meaning of unfamiliar words.
- Predicting content.
- Noting contradictions, inadequate information, ambiguities.
- Differentiating between fact and opinion.

In the 80s and 90s applied linguists also began to borrow new theoretical models of comprehension from the field of cognitive psychology. It was from this source that the distinction between *bottom-up processing* and *top-down processing* was derived, a distinction that led to an awareness of the importance of background knowledge, and schema in comprehension. The *bottom-up model* holds that listening is a linear, data-driven process. Comprehension occurs to the extent that the listener is successful in decoding the spoken text. The *top-down model* of listening, by contrast, involves the listener in actively constructing meaning based on expectations, inferences, intentions, knowledge of *schema* and other relevant *prior knowledge* and by a selective processing of the input. Listening came to be viewed as an interpretive process.

At the same time the fields of *conversation analysis* and *discourse analysis* were revealing a great deal about the organization of spoken discourse and led to a realization that

written texts read aloud could not provide a suitable basis for developing the abilities needed to process real-time authentic discourse. *Authenticity* in materials became a catchword and part of a pedagogy of teaching listening that is now well established in TESOL.

Then:

- Accurate recall of the information in a passage was the goal.
- Comprehension viewed as decoding.
- Learner viewed as a passive participant in listening.
- Little distinction between teaching and testing of listening.

Now:

- Comprehension viewed as a mix of bottom-up and top-down processes.
- Learner viewed as an active participant in listening.
- Comprehension viewed as the basis for acquisition.
- Listening materials often based on authentic speech and seek to capture features of authentic speech.

Teaching speaking

Speaking has always been a major focus of language teaching, however both the nature of speaking skills as well as approaches to teaching them have undergone a major shift in thinking in the last 30 years. Speaking in the early 70s usually meant, “repeating after the teacher, reciting a memorized dialogue, or responding to a mechanical drill” (Shrum and Glisan, 2000, p. 26). The emergence of the constructs of *communicative competence* and *proficiency* in the 80s, led to major shifts in conceptions of syllabuses and methodology, the effects of which continue to be seen today.

The theory of communicative competence prompted attempts at developing *communicative syllabuses* in the 80s, initially resulting in proposals for *notional syllabuses*, *functional syllabuses*, and more recently proposals for *task-based* and *text-based* approaches to teaching. *Fluency* became a goal for speaking courses and this could be developed through the use of *information-gap* and other tasks that required learners to attempt real communication despite limited proficiency in English. In so doing they would develop *communication strategies* and engage in *negotiation of meaning*, both of which were considered essential to the development of oral skills.

In foreign language teaching a parallel interest led to the *proficiency movement* in the 90s, which attempted to develop descriptions of bands of proficiency across the different skills areas and to use these bands as guidelines in program planning to help teachers establish course objectives and determine what students should be able to do upon completion of a course.

The notion of English as an International Language has prompted a revision of the notion of communicative competence to that of *intercultural competence*, a goal for both native speakers and language learners with a focus on learning how to communicate in ways appropriate in cross-cultural settings. At the same time it is now accepted that models for oral interaction cannot be based simply on the intuitions of applied linguists and textbook writers but should be informed by the findings of *conversation analysis* and *corpus analysis* of real speech. These have revealed such things as:

- The clausal nature of much spoken language and the role of *chunks*.
- The frequency of fixed utterances or *conversational routines* in spoken language.

- The interactive and negotiated nature of oral interaction involving such processes as *turn-taking*, *feedback*, and *topic management*.

Then:

- Speaking and oral interaction seen as ways of mastering basic patterns and structures.
- Models based on author intuition.
- Drills, dialogs, substitution exercises were basic classroom activities.
- Oral proficiency viewed as dependent upon mastery of structures.

Now:

- Speaking and oral interaction is seen as the basis for learning.
- English for cross-cultural communication a goal.
- Models informed by corpus analysis.
- Oral proficiency viewed as dependent upon mastery of lexical phases and conversational routines.

Teaching reading

In the 70, second language reading ability was viewed as the mastery of specific reading subskills or *microskills* (e.g., making inferences, comparisons or predictions), a view that to some extent continues to inform approaches to the teaching of reading today. These skills were often taught separately.

In the last 30 years the fields of psycholinguistics, cognitive science, discourse and text analysis as well as the field of second language reading research have considerably enriched our understanding of second language reading processes. Research has examined such issues as the role of *scripts* and *schema* in L2

comprehension, the nature of *coherence* and *cohesion* in texts, the effects of cross cultural difference in schematic knowledge, the role of *prior knowledge* in comprehension, and how knowledge of *text structure* and *discourse cues* affects comprehension. Research has demonstrated that L2 readers can benefit from the understanding of text structures and from the use of text-mapping strategies that highlight text structures and their function. The role of vocabulary in reading has also been extensively researched. Grabe (2002, p. 277) suggests the following research findings should inform approaches to L2 reading:

- The importance of discourse structure and graphic representations.
- The importance of vocabulary in language learning.
- The need for language awareness and attending to language and genre form.
- The existence of a second language proficiency threshold in reading.
- The importance of *metacognitive awareness* and strategy learning.
- The need for extensive reading.
- The benefits of integrating reading and writing.
- The importance of content-based instruction.

Although L2 reading programs are often designed to serve the needs of learners needing reading for academic purposes, the role English plays as the language in the Information and Communication Age is also prompting a rethinking of approaches to the teaching of reading in many parts of the world. Students must now learn to be able to apply what they have learned, to use knowledge to solve problems, and to be able to transfer learning to new situations.

Then:

- Comprehension is a process of decoding texts.
- Reading skills developed through graded and specially written texts.
- Literary reading skills the focus at higher levels and the reading of poetry, drama and literature.
- Effective comprehension is seen as developing automaticity in basic skills.

Now:

- Reading skills developed through the use of authentic texts.
- Comprehension is a creative and interactive process.
- Technical reading skills and information processing skills the focus at higher levels.
- Critical reasoning skills a priority for learners to be able to apply their understanding to solving real world problems.

Teaching writing

The status of writing within language teaching and applied linguistics has risen considerably in the last 30 years. The idea that writing is simply “speech written down” and therefore not worthy of serious attention has been replaced by a much more complex view of the nature of writing with the growth of *composition studies* and the field of second language writing. In the 70s learning to write in a second language was mainly seen to involve developing linguistic and lexical knowledge as well as familiarity with the syntactic patterns and cohesive devices that form the building blocks of texts (Hyland, in press).

Activities based on *controlled composition* that sought to prevent errors and develop correct writing habits predominated during this period. One of my earliest efforts (Richards 1974) at textbook

writing, *Guided Writing Through Pictures*, was firmly rooted in this tradition. Later the focus in teaching writing shifted to the *paragraph-pattern approach* with a focus on the use of *topic sentences*, *supporting sentences*, and *transitions* and practice with different functional patterns such as narration, description, comparison-contrast and exposition. It became apparent that good writing involved more than the ability to write grammatically correct sentences. Sentences need to be *cohesive* and the whole text needed to be *coherent*. And the field of *contrastive rhetoric* examined different conceptions of coherence across cultures. The study of model texts was central with the paragraph-pattern approach. Students would study the features of a model text and then write their own paragraphs following the model.

In the 90s, *process writing* introduced a new dimension into the teaching of writing with an emphasis on the writer and the strategies used to produce a piece of writing. Writing is viewed as “a complex, recursive and creative process that is very similar in its general outlines for first and second language writers: learning to write requires the development of an efficient and effective composing process (Silva and Matsuda, 2002, p. 261). The *composing processes* employed by writers were explored as well as the different strategies employed by proficient and less proficient writers. Drawing from the work of first language composition theory and practice, ESL students were soon being taught such processes as *planning*, *drafting*, *revising* and *editing* and how to give *peer feedback*.

More recently second language writing instruction in some parts of the world has been influenced by a *genre approach*. This looks at the ways in which language is used for particular purposes in particular contexts, i.e. the use of different *genres* of writing. Writing is seen as involving a complex web of relations

between writer, reader, and text. *Discourse communities* such as business executives, applied linguists, technicians, and advertising copywriters possess a shared understanding of the texts they use and create expectations as to the formal and functional features of such texts.

The field of second language writing is hence a dynamic one today and one that is generating an increasing amount of research.

Then:

- Learning by imitating and practicing models.
- Attempts to avoid errors through controlled and guided writing.
- Feedback provided by teacher.
- Mastery of functional patterns the goal at higher levels (narrative, exposition, description).

Now:

- Focus on composing processes.
- Focus on genres.
- Focus on text types and text organization.
- Use of peer feedback.

How can we assess students' learning?

In the 70s testing was something relatively new to applied linguistics. Techniques for testing grammar and the four skills were being developed as well as criteria for the construction of good test items. We can characterize the goals of testing in this era as measuring “competence” or underlying ability. “Assessment tended to take the form of proficiency testing, based on general ability constructs, which was largely unconnected to the curriculum” (Chapelle & Brindley 2002,

p. 284). Tests were *norm-referenced*, that is they measured the performance of learners in comparison with other test takers whose scores were given as the norm. The information obtained from tests was converted into marks, which were accumulated during the learning of a subject, and at the end of a course the student and the teacher were expected to be able to draw some inferences about the learner's ability from the marks obtained. The criteria that were used to evaluate tests up to the 1980s were mainly (Schmitt 2002, p. 8):

- *Validity* (did the test really measure what it was supposed to measure?).
- *Reliability* (did the test perform consistently from one administration to the next?).
- *Practicality* (was the test practical to give and mark in a particular setting?).

Since then the concept of validity has been subject to a considerable expansion and a number of criteria added to the notion of validity including (Messick 1989):

- *User-suitability* (for what kind of user might the test be useful).
- *Washback* (the positive or negative effect the test might have on teachers and other stakeholders).
- *Test method* (how did the test method used affect the scores?).

New goals and procedures

Additionally there has been a substantial refocusing of the goals and procedures of language testing. In terms of goals the qualities of *criterion-referenced* or *competency-based assessment* are often preferred rather than traditional approaches. Criterion referenced testing seeks to measure performance, rather than competence, measuring the learners

performance according to a *standard* or *criterion* that has been agreed upon. The student must reach this level of performance to pass the test and his or her score is interpreted with reference to the criterion score rather than to the scores of other students.

Alternative assessment

In the current period attention has also shifted to *alternative assessment*, referring to approaches to testing that are seen as complements to traditional standardized testing usually based on *qualitative assessment* rather than *quantitative assessment*. Traditional modes of assessment are said not to capture important information about test takers' abilities in a second language and are also not thought to reflect real-life conditions for language use. Assessment procedures now include a variety of methods for assessing learners' performance in more authentic circumstances including *self-assessment*, *peer assessment*, *portfolios*, *learner diaries*, *journals*, *student-teacher conferences*, *interviews*, and *observation*. However alternative assessment is not without its concerns, since some have doubts about the reliability of the procedures that are used as well as the administrative feasibility and cost effectiveness of alternative assessment (Chapelle and Brindley 2002, p. 282). Current approaches to testing advise to follow principles such as the following in assessing their learners' abilities:

- Use authentic materials as test stimuli.
- Prepare integrative tests that reflect the type of activities done in class.
- Provide opportunities for learners to use global language skills in a naturalistic authentic context.
- Develop a grading system that rewards both linguistic accuracy and creativity.

Then:

- Tests served to measure student achievement.
- Tests focused on discrete-point grammar items.
- Primarily paper-and-pencil testing.
- Norm-referenced testing.

Now:

- Criterion-referenced testing.
- Greater use of alternative assessment.
- Assessment strategies seek to integrate skills in meaningful contexts.
- Tests involve real-world tasks.

How can we prepare language teachers?

In the early 70s, learning to teach English as a second language was a process of acquiring a body of knowledge and skills from an external source, i.e. from experts. It was a kind of top-down process based on modeling good practices; the practices themselves built around a standard or recognized teaching method. Becoming a language teacher meant acquiring a set of discrete skills—lesson planning, techniques for presenting and practicing new teaching points and for teaching the four skills.

Second language teacher education

Between the 70s and the present period a sub-field of language teaching has emerged now known as *second language teacher education* (Roberts, 1998). This refers to the study of the theory and practice of teacher development for language teachers. In the last thirty years there has also developed a substantial industry devoted to providing language teachers with professional training and qualifications. The knowledge base

of language teaching has also expanded substantially although there are still significant differences of opinion concerning what the essential knowledge base of language teaching consists of.

Due to this lack of consensus as to the theoretical basis for language teaching, the kind of professional preparation teachers may receive varies considerably from country to country or even from institution to institution within a country, as a comparison of MA TESOL degrees in Canada and the United States reveals.

Training and development

From the 70s to the present period there has been a marked shift in our understanding of what we mean by teacher preparation. In the earlier period *teacher training* dominated but beginning in the 90s *teacher development* assumed a more central role (Richards 1998). *Teacher training* involves processes of the following kind:

- Understanding basic concepts and principles as a prerequisite for applying them to teaching.
- Expanding one's repertoire of routines, skills and strategies.
- Trying out new strategies in the classroom.
- Monitoring oneself and getting feedback from others on one's practice.

Teacher development serves a longer-term goal and seeks to facilitate growth of the teacher's general understanding of teaching and of himself or herself as a teacher. It often involves examining different dimensions of one's own practice as a basis for reflective review, and can hence be seen as "bottom-up." The following are examples of goals from a development perspective:

- Understanding the kinds of decision-making that occurs during lessons.
- Reviewing one's own theories and principles of language teaching.
- Determining learners' perceptions of classroom activities.
- Acquiring the skills of a mentor.

Teacher development is not seen as a one-off thing but a continuous process. The teacher is engaged in exploring his or her own teaching through *reflective teaching* in a collaborative process together with learners and colleagues. This reflects the prevailing educational philosophy of *constructivism*, which is currently popular in education including language teacher education: knowledge is actively constructed and not passively received. A constructive view of teaching involves teachers in making their own sense of their own classrooms and taking on the role of a reflective practitioner.

Then:

- Teachers trained to use a method.
- Teacher competence viewed as skill mastery.
- Technical aspects of teaching emphasized.
- Limited theoretical knowledge base in teacher preparation programs.

Now:

- Teachers trained in a variety of methods or approaches.
- Constructivist philosophy of teacher development.
- Teachers encouraged to develop their own personal approaches to teaching.
- Teachers learn through collaboration and self-reflection.

Conclusions

In discussing change in education Kuhn's (1970) notion of paradigm shift is often referred to (Jacobs and Farrell 2001). According to Kuhn new paradigms in science emerge rapidly as revolutions in thinking shatter previous ways of thinking. Reviewing changes in language teaching in the last 30 years, while some changes perhaps have the status of paradigm shifts (e.g., the spread of Communicative Language Teaching and Process Writing) most of the changes documented above have come about more gradually and at different times. In some contexts some of the changes may not even have started. But once the message is heard there is generally pressure to adopt new ideas and practices and so the cycle begins again. What prompts the need for change?

Probably the main motivation for change comes from dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs. Despite the resources expended on second and foreign language teaching worldwide in almost every country results normally do not match expectations, hence the constant pressure to adopt new curriculum, teaching methods, materials, and forms of assessment. Government policy often is the starting point for change when requirements are announced for a new curriculum or syllabus or for some other change in goals or the delivery of language instruction.

In planning directions for change, language teaching draws on a number of influences (Richards and Rodgers 2001). These include:

- Trends in the profession such as when particular practices or approaches become sanctioned by the profession.

- Guru-led innovations such as when the work of a particular educationist becomes fashionable or dominant.
- Responses to technology such as when the potential of the World Wide Web catches the imagination of teachers.
- Influences from academic disciplines, such as when ideas from psychology, linguistics, or cognitive science shape language pedagogy.
- Learner-based innovations such as the learner-centered curriculum.

Once changes have been adopted they are often promoted with reformist zeal. Previous practices suddenly become out of fashion and positive features of earlier practices are quickly forgotten. Doubtless the new directions described in this paper will be so regarded in a similar review 30 years hence. In the meantime it is hoped that the overview given here will enable language teaching professionals to assess the currency of their own educational practices as well as reflect on the changes they have experienced or are preparing for in their own institutions.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Mr. Ao Ran, who provided considerable assistance with the content analysis of the journals.

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