THE THIRD WAY

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Abstract

Apart from the traditional division "the teacher-centered" or "the student-centered education" the third option is, according to my mind and experience, more promising, more effective and more flexible. Namely, "the teacher-centered" education looks like an obsolete and worn-out concept, while "the student-centered" is mostly recognized as contemporary approach which must totally replace the old concept with predominant teacher's authority. The teacher-centered notion encapsulates teachers as the focal points of education. In other words teachers are organizers who rule the whole process of education, while students are mostly passive observers which active participation is strictly limited. On the other hand "the student-centered" education allegedly eliminates all major deficiencies of traditional authoritarian style fostering students' participation in all phases of education. The focus is shifted from teaching to learning (from teachers to students). The solution seems workable, efficient and self-evident - which is not the case. Instead of two extreme positions the third option emerges as more efficient; "the quality-centered education". The purpose of my paper is to prove the benefits of the "third approach" and define its major characteristics.

Key words: approaches, concepts, contemporary, the third option

Introduction

The third way deals with the set of dichotomies which reflect a tendency to sharply divide opposite methodological trends without leaving enough space for compromising solutions. The history of techniques and principles in language teaching (teaching methods) is a substantial aspect of the knowledge base for teachers. Educators expand a repertoire of techniques which are not reducible to one single method uncritically accepted as the most effective and overwhelming, in other words stale and overly routinized (Prabhu, 1990). Seasoned teachers have at their disposal a large, diverse stock of best practices (Arends, 1998) which encapsulates the unique qualities, personal preferences and idiosyncrasies of their students. Despite all potential benefits from a study of methods there is a latent threat in the assumption that the knowledge of methods is mere prescription which should be followed by the book. Primarily all methods are per definition decontextualized and, as such, they are detached from "a real life" in our classrooms. The way of implementing certain methods depends on the teacher's competences, the institutional constraints, students' back-up knowledge, learning outcomes, the number of lessons / lectures etc. plus exigencies in the classroom (unprecedented moments which can't be anticipated). The third way implies potentials hidden in a creative and highly personal approach which refutes the set of typical dichotomies and the rigidity of teaching methods. To exemplify the third way we can start with the common notions of the conflicting and antagonistic strategies (the teacher-centeredvs student-centered education). Most contemporary teachers stick to the concept of the student-centered education while conservative teachers find teacher-centered strategy more profitable and effective. This dichotomy neglects "the third way" solution which is neither the teacher-centerednor the student-centered but the quality-centered approach. The goal of this paper is to promote "the third-way" strategy highlighting benefits from avoiding most common dichotomies and empowering both teachers and students with more flexible approach which is not closed in the strict theoretical frames. The study of methods is inspiring in spite of its limitations and a radical criticism which tends to skip all theoretical frames as futile effort to comprise a real life within dogmatic concepts. If we recognize the invaluable contribution to the quality of both teaching and learning the study of methods encourage continuing educationin the lifelong process of learning to teach (Larsen-Freeman, 1998).

Grammar-Translation vs Direct Method

We can start our topic with the comparison between the grammar-translation (the classical method) and the direct method recently revived as a method

which promotes learning how to use a foreign language in communication. The grammar-translation method was first used in the teaching of the classical languages, Latin and Greek (Chastain, 1988) which underlying assumption (or rationale) is that through the study of the grammar of the target language students will be able to cope with the grammatical features of their native language. The usage of the target language is neglected as marginal, while grammar is treated as the focal point of all languages which, combined with translation, serves as the very foundation of learning. The direct-method insists on one "none-negotiable principle" – translation is not allowed, which is fostered by the conviction that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through various visual aids and demonstrations (Diller, 1978) The following principles could be observed as the marrow of the grammar-translation and the direct-method (GT and DM) which reflect the antagonism between the two methods. The "the-third way" (TW) potential solutions are added after contrasting principles:

• (GT) An essential purpose of learning foreign languages is reading literature.

• (DM) The main objective is learning how to communicate (gaining communicative competence)

• (TW) Both is needed (intensive reading is one of four major language skills), but the accent is more on the communicative competence. Reading itself contributes effectively to our communicative competence (through reading we enlarge vocabulary, subconsciously assimilate grammar forms etc.) Reading is not waste of precious time if we know how to incorporate inspiring and informative reading sessions into typical communicative practice.

• (GT) The primary skills are gradually developed through reading and writing while speaking, listening and pronunciation are rather irrelevant.

• (DM) Speaking and listening are of utmost significance. Pronunciation should be worked on from the beginning of language instructions

• (TW) The third-way is comprehensible approach which combines all four major language skills without neglecting the necessity to practice pronunciation as one of the vital parts of language instructions.

• (GT) Students pay a lot of attention to analysing and assimilating the forms of the target language.

• (DM) Forms of the target language are acquired as the result of the massive exposure (primarily speaking and listening). Strict analysis of the language forms is needless – all we need is gained through the process of acquisition.

• (TW) The prime principle is the quality of the target language – if it is easier to clarify and analyse certain grammatical forms then it is highly recommended. Although the emphasis is on the process of acquisition learning and analysing is not abandoned. Whatever facilitates our teaching and learning process is welcomed.

• (GT) Deductive reasoning of explicit grammatical rules is predominantly used.

• (DM) Inductive reasoning (the bottom-up) is more efficient and more dominant then deductive (the top-down procedure).

• (TW) There is no exclusive approach; the choice between deductive and inductive reasoning depends on topics, the complexity of the content, the age of students, learning outcomes etc.

• (GT) Translation is often used in the form of the contrastive analyses.

• (DM) Translation is almost never used; the target language is the only way of communication in the classrooms.

• (TW) Translation is used whenever it is needed – to contrast language forms, adequately understand idiomatic expressions, explain grammar etc.

The above mentioned peculiar features of the grammar-translation and the direct-method serve as the illustration of the "third-way approach" which in its contextualized form seeks the most profitable ways of acquiring the target language without diminishing the relevance of traditional learning (Jeremy, 2007)

Common Dichotomies

The following list contains the most frequent dichotomies which are stumbling blocks in the history of teaching foreign languages (the whole spectrum contains polarities taken as antagonistic tendencies and principles).

1. The nature of language (as one of distinguishing features in methodology and major dichotomy) runs through the whole linguistics in the last decades. The notion of language could be understood from its formal or functional aspect, meaning that formal aspect relates to the traditional teaching while functional aspect (contemporary trend) underlines the pragmatic nature of language, in other words its applicative usage in the form of communicative competence. The third way accentuates functional aspect without marginalizing its formal nature (grammar, analyses, elaborations, explicit clarifications, memorizing rules etc.) The point is that the quality-centered education never dispels certain techniques or language principles because it is in vogue or a fashionable trend. The ultimate goal is to use "everything what works well" without ostracising methods (even the most obsolete) in its totality or glorifying any particular method as the finite solution.

2. The nature of learning is either construe as analytic (cognitive, intellectual) or experiential (related to progressive education going back to the work of John Dewey). The third way embraces both concepts with preference towards experiential learning and an adequate focus on the analytic nature of languages. Cognitive efforts are appreciated as utterly meaningful and profound whenever we deal with demanding theoretical issues, complexities and subtleties which can't be resolved in solely experiential learning.

3. The goals of SL learning are mainly focused on either accuracy or communication

(fluency). The third way rejects all extreme and mutually exclusive approaches and rather seeks the complementary nature of uncompromising views. The final assessment relies on the goals of education in the concrete context without prescriptive and undeviating guidelines. Teachers should define the most optimum solution regardless of all theoretical arguments which, in its hyperbolical forms, unjustifiably expel momentous techniques and principles in the name of dubious "bee-lines" in education (fiercely advocated by some teachers and experts as the all-embracing and impeccable concepts). The relevance of communication should not be stressed at the expense of accuracy if we are not willing to accept broken English as the final result of purely communicative approach which sacrifices accuracy in the name of fluency.

4. The type of syllabus could be considered from two different angles - whether the focus is mainly on the system (grammar, phonology, vocabulary etc.) or whether it is focused more on the skills (reading, speaking, writing,listening). The choice between the two aspects (systems or skills) is rather artificial and arbitrary from the "third-way angle" because of the fact that systems and skills are integrated in most current syllabuses. The focus is rather flexible; it moves from one side to the other depending on learning outcomes. The third way is more rational adjustment to the student's need and learning outcomes than an abrupt or radical shift from one polarity to its opposite counterpart.

5. If syllabuses are segregated English is taught as a separate subject, if integrated then English is connected with other subjects (the content-based learning etc.) The third way option tends to use main positive features of English as a segregated and integrated subject; segregation implies an intensive focus on the target language while integration incorporates different subjects in which English is used as the means of communication

6. The process of learning could foster either cognitive (intellectual) or affective factors (inducing positive emotions the level of stress is minimized while anxiety-free active participation maximized). The third way approach liberates teachers and learners from one-sided solutions seeking the most efficient mixture between the two more complementary then mutually exclusive concepts.

7. The teaching process could be either transmissive (traditional ex-cathedra lecturing style) or more dialogic (interactive). The third way is adaptable and contextualized which means that both teaching styles have its place in the contemporary education.

8. The top-down strategy (deductive teaching) is more adequate for young learners while the bottom-up strategy (inductive teaching) is more effective with secondary school and university students. The third way never sticks to only one strategy; teachers themselves should modify their teaching styles according to their knowledge and experience.

9. Bilingual teaching leaves the room for the native language whenever it is justified (complexities and shades in translation contrasting analyses, certain grammatical topics etc.), while monolingual approach insists only on the target language as the means of communication between teachers and students. The third way solution finds convincing rationale in both teaching principles.

Constructivism vs Direct teaching

In recent years the burning and still unsolved debate is related to the benefits of "constructed" knowledge versus instructed knowledge (Rowe, 2006). The advocates of "constructed knowledge" (constructivists) adamantly believe that the profound nature of learning requires individual creativeness as the principal source of personal understanding, reflection and action. Predigested information transmitted by a teacher and presented in a textbook (Zevenbergen, 1995) are not presupposed as the mandatory stage for deepening the existing knowledge. On the other hand, instructivists uphold the merits and efficacy of explicit or direct teaching. A structured course is taken as the very foundation necessary for sequential and orderly manner, which is reviewed regularly, assessed and practised. The opposing approaches are referred in the current professional literature as "progressive methods" versus "traditional didactic teaching" (Adkisson& McCoy, 2006), or as "minimally guided instruction" and "explicit instructions".

The underlying principles of constructivism were formulated by John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner who emphasized the relevance of firsthand experience and various sorts of activities derived from the process of learning. The Russian psychologist Lew Vygotskyexpanded the concept of constructivism by collaborative social interaction which is achievable in the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky introduced "social constructivism" with accent on feedback, discussion and sharing of ideas, while Piaget's "cognitive constructivism" underlines the intellectual development (less on social interaction).

Constructivist nomenclature comprises the following set of terms; a class of students has become "community of learners"; learning by doing has become "process approach" or "experiential learning"; learning has become "knowledge construction", while the support provided by teachers, adults or more knowledgeable peers is expressed by the term "scaffolding". The constructivist concept (active learning) promotes new challenging roles of the teacher such as facilitator and supporter, rather than controller (organizer or instructor). A pervading assumption of constructivist rationale is that students are eager to learn (that they possess strong intrinsic motivation), but it is more likely that the level of motivation of most stu-

dents is average which will not suffice if teachers rely entirely on constructivism (experiential learning). A constructivist "find-out-for-yourself" approach is not fruitful when it comes to young learners (basic literacy and numeracy learning). For most children demand to actively discover certain rules, definitions or shades of meaning proves to be rather formidable and futile. Jonassen (1992) developed a three-stage model of knowledge acquisition:

Stage 1 – initial language acquisition

Stage 2 – advanced knowledge

Stage 3 – expertise

Jonassen agrees that direct teaching is highly effective if it is related to initial knowledge acquisition while the levels of advanced knowledge and expertise mostly benefit from a constructive strategy. Higher-order critical reading (as well as profound comprehension) belongs to advanced knowledge effectively transmitted by the strategy of the constructive teaching, while establishing basic skills is realized and enabled by the direct teaching. Constructive approach as the set of unstructured discovery-type activities is inefficient for the achieving learning outcomes if students are not equipped with sound independent learning skills (Presley and McCormick, 1995). As the example of the harsh criticism referred to constructivism Delpit (1988, p. 287) quoted one student: "I didn't feel she was teaching us anything. She wanted us to correct each other's papers and we were there to learn from her. She didn't teach us anything, absolutely nothing."If teachers insist on solely student-centered activities one of potential problems is constructing misconceptions which are unnecessary diversions from desired learning outcomes. Related to time-consuming constructivist strategy Kirnschner (2006, p. 80) points that: "As a consequence, learners can engage in problem-solving activities for extended periods and learn almost nothing."According to Rosenshine (1986)the direct-teaching comprises the following six major components:

- daily review
- clear presentation of new material
- guided practice by students
- immediate correction and feedback from teacher
- independent practice
- weekly and monthly reviews

Direct instruction (DI) was initially devised by Engelmann at the University of Oregon as a fast-paced method of teaching that includes intensive interaction between students and teachers. In order to be effective DI procedures are founded on reinforcement, clear objectives, regular error correction, modelling, high response rate and practice to mastery. All steps are teachable and learnable if lesson

contents are sufficiently reduced and transmitted in a way which enables students to learn correctly. To avoid potential weaknesses of DI (they could be too prescriptive, too highly structured and too rapidly paced) teachers must pay particular attention to comprehension checks and feedback. To compensate potential weaknesses of DI a much less structured form of direct teaching is introduced in the form of interactive whole-class teaching which is particularly accepted in the United Kingdom and some other countries. Interactive whole-class teaching engage all students as active participants which generates a high level of attention enhanced by dialogue, asking questions and personal contributions which are nor reduced to one-sided (ex-cathedra) style of lecturing. Without being constrained by rigidly structured lessons interactive model comprises essential features of direct teaching and, as such, it is delivered in digestible chunks of knowledge. All forms of direct teaching methods encapsulate a repertoire of the following skills and competences (Peter, 2008, p.17):

• planning the content and method of delivery (including appropriate use of audio-visual equipment and ICT)

• managing the available time efficiently

• presenting the content in an interesting and motivating way

• explaining and demonstrating clearly

• knowing when and how to explain key points in more detail

• using appropriate questioning to focus students' attention, stimulate their thinking, and check for understanding

• dealing with questions raised by students

• evaluating students' learning and participation

• giving feedback to students

Concluding Remarks

Key issues related to suitability of direct teaching methods are harmonized with the core values of the third-way approach (Peter Westwood, 2008, p.16):

• A teaching method must be selected for its suitability in a given context: No single method of teaching can be used for all types of subject matter or for achieving all educational goals.

• Under what conditions are direct methods appropriate? Direct teaching is advocated for the beginning stages of learning new information, skills or strategies.

• Strengths, weaknesses and applications of direct teaching: Direct methods have much to offer if used in appropriate ways to achieve appropriate goals.

• Optimising and enhancing the effects of teaching methods: All teaching methods can be made more effective by attending to particular aspects of implementation.

The third-way strategy of teaching is close to the concept of enhanced lectures if the teacher succinctly presents topics and then engages students in open discus-

sions, while the closure includes consolidating and summarizing key points from the lecture. Eggen and Kauchak (2004)claim that most of the structural (inherent) weaknesses in the strict lecturing style can be overcome if the teacher-time is interspersed with short dialogic sessions (periods of questioning and discussion). Accordingly, Ormrod (2000, p. 533) states: "The more students pay attention and the more they engage in meaningful learning, organization, elaboration, and so on, the more they are likely to benefit from the lectures they hear and the textbooks they read." The third-way avoids one-sided approaches and promotes the strategy of teaching which is based on theoretical assumptions and immediate experience (a given context). There are no final or impeccable methods; every single teacher should adjust his or her teaching style according to personal competences and contextualized factors. Such "loose" approach acquires a profound grasp of various (often conflicting) educational trends and creative thinking which is not reducible to sheer acceptance of any single method. The application of principled eclecticism primarily addresses the issue of learner's needs and styles thus comprising interlanguage skills, comprehensible input, negotiation of meaning and product oriented approach. The third-way strategy is "method without methods", having in mind that every single method is based on certain exaggerated forms which inevitably suppress some other relevant aspect of teaching. The principal structural flaw of all methods is their alleged all-embracing nature and we need just a bit of immediate experience to realize that the way of teaching is above all radical concepts of the "absolute truth". Teaching is more than science or art and there are no short-cuts to the final solutions, even if they are disguised in the form of scientifically and empirically based methods. The third-way perspective recognizes potentials above the horizon of established or widely accepted methods thus leading to one of the most challenging adventure of encouraging and decoding explicit and hidden capacities of human beings.

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