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Title: Critical response to reading

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Assignment Coversheet

Language Teaching Methodology G 8095

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Assignment name	Critical response to reading
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Article review

Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). The postmethod condition: (E)merging strategies for second/foreign language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28, 27–48.

This is a critical review of an article by Kumaravadivelu (1994), entitled "The postmethod condition: (E)merging strategies for second/foreign language teaching". This article, as its title suggests, is aimed at introducing a postmethod condition which is believed to be able to refigure the relationship between theorizers and teachers by empowering teachers with knowledge, skills, and autonomy. The writer suggests that the postmethod condition, which signifies a search for "an alternative to method" rather than an alternative method, is the result of the widespread dissatisfaction with the conventional concept of method where the same old ideas have been continually recycled. The following is the summary of the article, followed by a critical review discussed in relation to the research and literature in the field of English Language Teaching.

Kumaravadivelu began by highlighting the increasing trend towards the dissatisfaction with the traditional concept of method and the growing awareness of the unsuccessful search for the best alternative method. He then proposed the postmethod condition by outlining its three major characteristics, suggesting a strategic framework of L2 teaching regarding the postmethod condition, and discussing possible uses of the framework for L2 teaching.

Characteristics of the postmethod condition

The article discusses three main characteristics of the postmethod condition which creates possibilities for redefining the theorizer-practitioner relationship. Firstly, the postmethod condition triggers a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method. Kumaravadivelu stated that there are contradictions between methods as conceptualized by theorists and methods as realized by teachers. Therefore, the practice of devising alternative methods is unsuccessful. Secondly, the postmethod condition promotes teacher autonomy. In this sense, the postmethod condition can enable teachers to "theorize from their practice and practice

what they have theorized" (p. 30) through self-evaluation and reflection on their own teaching practice. Thirdly, the postmethod condition is informed by "principled pragmatism". Kumaravadivelu used this term to emphasize the importance of the actual classroom practice where teachers completely understand what they do in the classroom and operate with a sense of plausibility.

A strategic framework of L2 teaching

Kumaravadivelu proposed 10 macrostrategies for the postmethod condition. Those macrostrategies include (a) maximizing learning opportunities, (b) facilitating negotiated interaction, (c) minimizing perceptual mismatches, (d) activating intuitive heuristics, (e) fostering language awareness, (f) contextualizing linguistic input, (g) integrating language skills, (h) promoting learner autonomy, (i) raising cultural consciousness, and (j) ensuring social relevance. Each of these macrostrategies was briefly discussed with some suggestions on useful sources, from which teachers can draw for the design of classroom microstrategies or techniques.

Uses of the framework

The last section of the article discusses the flexibility of the framework, that is, minor or major modifications by classroom teachers to the framework are welcomed. Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu added that the framework can be used to "transform classroom practitioners into strategic teachers and strategic researchers" (p. 43). Strategic teachers here are those who reflect on their own teaching, strive to stay informed and involved, adapt macrostrategies to suit their own classroom practice, and design appropriate microstrategies to maximize students' learning outcomes. As strategic researchers, however, teachers become classroom action researchers who assess their own teaching performance and develop their own practical theory of language pedagogy.

A critical review

Kumaravadivelu's article is of great importance to the field of ELT. First of all, not only does it raise teachers' awareness of the alternative to method and help them reflect on their own teaching practice as practitioners, but it also redefines the unidirectional relationship between theorizers and teachers. In other words, the 10 macrostrategies presented in the article provide teachers with clear and helpful guidance on managing their class and helping them achieve the desired learning outcomes. Moreover, classroom teachers are no longer the faithful followers of pedagogical theories advanced by theorists, yet they become theorizers of their own classroom practice. Through the postmethod condition, for example, teachers are equipped with knowledge of macrostrategies useful for them to devise their own alternative to method informed by their classroom experience and experimentation.

Secondly, the article offers useful insights into the development of teacher independence and flexibility. By refiguring the theorizer-practitioner relationship, the postmethod condition helps promote teacher autonomy and transforms teachers into classroom researchers with action research and reflective approaches to teaching. To put it simply, in the postmethod condition, teachers become autonomous decision makers, and they have complete control over what they do in the classroom. They can, for instance, analyze and assess their own teaching practice and make changes to it as necessary. Moreover, they become more flexible in terms of teaching techniques or strategies they use in the classroom because they can now justify their decisions based on their sense of plausibility, a concept proposed by Prabhu (1990) who argued that the activity of teaching is productive when the teachers' sense of plausibility is engaged.

Thirdly, the 10 macrostrategies listed above clearly take into account a number of factors which contribute to the success of the teaching and learning process. Macrostrategies 1 and 4, for example, are aimed at maximizing learning opportunities and activating intuitive heuristics among learners. These principles are the key elements in every language class because learners need ample learning opportunities to be actively engaged in making sense of the language input presented to them. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to provide students with plenty of opportunities for learning and encourage them to be independent learners who analyse and discover for themselves how the language operates. Similarly, macrostrategy 8, promoting learner autonomy, is vitally important in that teachers need to introduce their students to various

learning strategies and train them to use those strategies so that they can learn how to learn, take responsibilities for their own learning, and become self-directed learners.

Finally, it is crucial that Kumaravadivelu did not neglect the significance of classroom interactions, the integration of the four macro skills, and the contexts in which the language is used. According to a study by Wang and Castro (2010), for example, it is found that classroom interactions between (1) students and students and (2) students and teachers are vital ingredients for the success of language learning because they not only help make learners notice the target language forms, but they also have facilitative impact on language learning in general. As for the integration of language skills and the importance of contexts, it is no doubt that the four macro skills should be favourably taught in tandem with one another since they are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Moreover, the integration of skills reflects the interactive and integrated nature of language and the fact that each skill is not normally used in isolation. Equally important is the context of language use, which, therefore, requires teachers to provide their students with contextualized linguistic input so that students will be able to see the language in its actual usage and understand its meaning used in contexts.

Despite all the positive points mentioned above, the 10 macrostrategies need to be expanded to include other factors which play pivotal roles in the success of a second/foreign learning such as age, sex, personality, motivation, anxiety, and learning styles (Dörnyei, 2006; Ellis, 1994; Robinson, 2002). Many researchers, for example, agree that motivation is a predictor of success in second language learning (Dörnyei, 2006; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Thus, it is imperative to consider the powerful effect of motivation on language learning success. Teachers can motivate their students to learn by discussing with them the enormous benefits of English knowledge for their study and future career. Teachers should also help their students to understand and embrace the true value of English so that they would have a clear motive in learning and trying for success. Furthermore, the framework discussed in the article can be greatly improved by providing a more detailed and practical guideline for the development of microstrategies or classroom techniques which can be used to achieve the stated goal of the macrostrategic framework.

All in all, although Kumaravadivelu's framework needs expansion and modification in order to be more comprehensive and practical for language classrooms, the article has contributed to a better understanding of the ongoing development of approaches and methods in language teaching. It has also raised our awareness of the significance of classroom interactions, contextualized linguistic input, integration of skills, and learner autonomy, all of which are key ingredients for the success of students' learning. Moreover, the article has put forward a sophisticated concept of postmethod condition which is believed to be not only capable of empowering teachers with the knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary for them to develop the capacity to theorize from their classroom practice and practice what they theorize, but also transforming them into strategic teachers and strategic researchers (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Most importantly, this article has initiated and paved the way for further research into the concept of postmethod or an alternative to method so that we will be able to gain better and deeper insights into how language should be taught and learned more effectively.

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