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Curriculum Design

“Approach and Method in ELT”

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An Introduction

As the study of teaching methods and procedures in language teaching assumed a more central role within applied linguistics in the latter part of the twentieth century, various attempts have been made to conceptualize the nature of methods and to explore more systematically the relationship between theory and practice within a method. In this chapter we will clarify the relationship between approach and method and present a model for the description, analysis, and comparison of methods.

Approach and Method

When linguists and language specialists sought to improve the quality of language teaching in the late nineteenth century, they often did so by referring to general principles and theories concerning how languages are learned, how knowledge of language is represented and organized in memory, or how language itself is structured. The early applied linguists, such as Henry Sweet (1845-1912), Otto Jespersen (1860-1943), and Harold Palmer (1877-1949) (see Chapters 1 and 3), elaborated principles and theoretically accountable approaches to the design of language teaching programs, courses, and materials, though many of the specific practical details were left to be worked out by others. They sought a rational answer to questions such as those regarding principles for the selection and sequencing of vocabulary and grammar, though none of these applied linguists saw in any existing method the ideal embodiment of their ideas. In describing methods, the difference between a philosophy of language teaching at the level of theory and principles and a set of derived procedures for teaching a language is central. In an attempt to clarify this difference, a scheme was proposed by the American applied linguist Edward Anthony in 1963. He identified three levels of conceptualization and organization, which he termed approach, method, and technique. The arrangement is hierarchical. The organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach.

An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of Language teaching and learning.

An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught. Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no Part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach.

An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. Within one approach, there can be many methods.

A technique is implementation - that which actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective.

Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well. According to Anthony's model, approach is the level at which assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning are specified; method is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which choices are made about the particular skills to be taught, the content to be taught, and the order in which the content will be presented; technique is the level at which classroom procedures are described. Anthony's model serves as a useful way of distinguishing between different degrees of abstraction and specificity found in different language teaching proposals. Thus, we can see that the proposals of the Reform Movement were at the level of approach and that the Direct Method is one method derived from this approach. The so - called Reading Method, which evolved as a result of the Coleman Report (see Chapter 1) , should really be described in the plural - reading methods - since a number of different ways of implementing a reading approach have been developed . Other ways of conceptualizing approaches and methods in language teaching have also been proposed.

Mackey, in his book *Language Teaching Analysis* (1965), elaborated perhaps the most well-known model of the 1960 s, one that focuses primarily on the levels of method and technique. Mackey's model of language teaching analysis concentrates on the dimensions of selection ,gradation, presentation, and repetition underlying a method. Although Anthony's original proposal has the advantage of simplicity and comprehensiveness and serves as a useful way of distinguishing the relationship between underlying theoretical principles and the practices derived from them, it does not give sufficient attention to the nature of a method itself. Nothing is said

about the roles of teachers and learners assumed in a method, for example, nor about the role of instructional materials or the form are these materials expected to take. Nor does it account for how an approach may be realized in a method, or for how method and technique are related. In order to provide a more comprehensive model for the discussion and analysis of approaches and methods, we have revised and extended the original Anthony model. The primary areas needing further clarification are, using Anthony's terms, method and technique. We see approach and method treated at the level of design, that level in which objectives, syllabus, and content are determined, and in which the roles of teachers, learners, and instructional materials are specified.

-Approach

Following Anthony, approach refers to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching. In other words, it refers to the “philosophy,” or belief system, that a method reflects. We will examine the linguistic and psycholinguistic aspects of approach in turn.

Theory of Language

Language is a very complex phenomenon and is studied from the perspective of many different disciplines, including linguistics, literature, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Here we will briefly review models of language that have influenced language teaching methods and approaches. These include the Cognitive model, the Structural model, the Functional model, the Interactional model, the sociocultural model, the Genre model, and the Lexical model. Cognitive model A cognitive view of language is based on the idea that language reflects properties of the mind. Atkinson (2011: 4- 5) identifies a number of core features and assumptions of a cognitive view of language, or “cognitivist” : 1. Mind as a computer - a set of operations that take in input, process it, and produce output, as with a computer 2. Representationalism - processes that the mind engages in to store internal representations of external events 3. Learning as abstract knowledge acquisition - i.e. abstracting the rules of the competence that underlies linguistic performance, as Noam Chomsky put it. Chomsky’s theory of universal grammar, or UG, first proposed in the 1980s is a well-developed example of a cognitive

model of language. According to UG theory, our minds contain a mental grammar that consists of universal principles that are common to all languages, and parameters that vary according to different languages.

The Grammar Translation Method can perhaps be understood as an early example of a cognitive view of Language since it reflects the idea that the learner has built up knowledge of the principles of a language by abstracting its rules through a study of grammar and through translation – based activities. Structural model Another way of conceptualizing language and one that has had a wide application in language teaching is the structural view, the view that language is a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning. The target of language learning is seen to be the mastery of elements of this system, which are generally defined in terms of phonological units (e . g . , phonemes) , grammatical units (e . g . , clauses, phrases, sentences) , grammatical operations (e . g . , adding, shifting, joining , or transforming elements) , and lexical items (e . g . , function words and structure words) .

The Audio-lingual Method embodies this particular view of language as do such methods as Situational Language Teaching Total Physical Response.

Functional Model

A different model of language and one which takes a number of different forms is the functional view, the view that language is a vehicle for the expression of functional meanings and for performing real - world activities. Functional models of language are linked to the concept of communicative competence - knowing how language is used to achieve different kinds of communicative purposes. Functional approaches emphasize the semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely the grammatical characteristics of language, and lead to a specification and organization of language teaching content by categories of meaning and function rather than by elements of structure and grammar. Interactional model Yet another perspective on language can be called the interactional view .

It sees language as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals. Language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations. Areas of inquiry being

drawn on in the development of interactional approaches to language teaching include second language acquisition, interaction analysis, conversation analysis, and ethnomethodology. Interactional theories focus on the patterns of moves, acts, negotiation, and interaction found in conversational and other kinds of exchanges and which are central to an understanding of discourse. “Students achieve facility in using a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages (that is, messages that contain information of interest to both speaker and listener in a situation of importance to both).”Negotiation of meaning is believed to play a central role in interactive views of language

Sociocultural Model

Sociocultural theory views language as a communicative activity in which the social context is central. Knowledge is constructed through social interaction with others and reflects the learner's culture, customs, and beliefs as well as the collaborative activities people are engaged in. Genre model Genre refers to an area of human activity where there are norms of language usage, such as in science, business, medicine, literature. Texts are the units of discourse that occur in different genres such as narratives, descriptions, and explanations. The main concepts of this model of language can be summarized as follows (Feez1998: 5):

- Language is a resource for making meaning.
- The resource of language consists of a set of interrelated systems.
- Language users draw on this resource each time they use language. • Language users create texts to create meaning. • Texts are shaped by the social context in which they are used.
- The social context is shaped by the people using language It has also had an impact on the teaching of both English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes.