Chapter 8

Postmethod Condition

8. INTRODUCTION

With clearly identifiable sets of theoretical principles and classroom procedures associated with language-, learner- and learning-centered categories of method, the language-teaching profession appears to have exhausted the kind of psychological, linguistic, and pedagogic underpinnings it has depended on for constructing alternative methods. In all probability, the invention of a truly novel method that is fundamentally different from the ones discussed in Part Two is very slim, at least in the foreseeable future. Within the confines of the concept of method, what perhaps remain for further manipulation and management are different permutations and combinations of the familiar principles and procedures. This does not mean that the profession has a reached a dead end; rather, it means that the profession has completed yet another phase in its long, cyclical history of methods, and has just set sail in uncharted waters. The new millennium has brought new challenges as well as new opportunities for the profession to venture beyond methods.

In recent times, the profession has witnessed a steady stream of critical thoughts on the nature and scope of method. Scholars such as Allwright (1991), Pennycook (1989), Prabhu (1990), and Stern (1983, 1985, 1992) have not only cautioned language-teaching practitioners against the uncritical acceptance of untested methods but they have also counseled them against the very concept of method itself. The uneasiness about the concept of method expressed by them is hardly new. We find well-articulated arguments about the limitations of method even in the 1960s, as in Kelly (1969),

and Mackey (1965), just to mention two. However, this time around, the professional response has been significantly different. Having witnessed how methods go through endless cycles of life, death, and rebirth, the language teaching profession seems to have reached a state of heightened awareness—an awareness that as long as it is caught up in the web of method, it will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives it to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas, and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. This renewed awareness coupled with a resolve to respond has created what I have called the *postmethod condition* (Kumaravadivelu, 1994b). What is meant by postmethod condition? How is it different from the earlier state of affairs? I address these and other related questions in terms of the limits of method, and the logic of postmethod.

8.1. THE LIMITS OF METHOD

The concept of method has severe limitations that have long been overlooked by many. They relate mainly to its ambiguous usage and application, to the exaggerated claims made by its proponents, and, consequently, to the gradual erosion of its utilitarian value. Let me briefly consider each under the headings: the meaning of method, the myth of method, and the death of method.

8.1.1. The Meaning of Method

"The question of method," declares the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (2000), "is one of the central issues of instruction" (p. 616). Citing the original Greek word, *methodos*, which "includes the idea of a series of steps leading towards a conceived goal" (p. 617), the *Encyclopedia* defines method simply as "a planned way of doing something" (p. 617). Turning to the specific context of language teaching, it states, rather awkwardly: "A method implies an orderly way of going about something, a certain degree of advance planning and of control, then; also, a process rather than a product" (p. 617). As the quote indicates, the meaning of method, as used in second/foreign language teaching, is shrouded in a veil of vagueness, despite its central importance.

Recall our discussion in chapter 4 where a distinction between *method* and *methodology* was made. Method is a construct; methodology is a conduct. Method is an expert's notion derived from an understanding of the theories of language, of language learning, and of language teaching. It is also reflected in syllabus design, textbook production, and, above all, in recommended classroom procedures. Methodology, on the other hand, is what

the teacher does in the classroom in order to maximize learning opportunities for the learner. Recall also that the distinction was made based on Mackey's (1965) perceptive observation that method analysis is different from teaching analysis: "method analysis determines how teaching is done by the book; teaching analysis shows how much is done by the teacher" (p. 139). There is, thus, a crucial distinction between method and methodology, a distinction that is seldom understood or maintained. Method, to continue with the thoughts expressed by Mackey, "has become a matter of opinion rather than of fact. It is not surprising that feelings run high in these matters, and that the very word 'method' means so little and so much" (p. 139).

Even the authors of popular textbooks on methods are not sure of the number of methods that are out there. A book published in the mid 1960s, for instance, has listed 15 "most common" types of methods "still in use in one form or another in various parts of the world" (Mackey, 1965 p. 151). Two books published in the mid-1980s (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; and Richards & Rodgers, 1986) provided, between them, a list of 11 methods. The same two books, in their revised, second editions published in 2000 and 2001 respectively, contain between them nearly twenty methods, such as (in alphabetical order): Audiolingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Community Language Learning, Competency-Based Language Teaching, Direct Method, Grammar-Translation Method, Natural Approach, Oral and Situational Language Teaching, Lexical Approach, Silent Way, Suggestopedia (or, Desuggestopedia), Task-Based Language Teaching, Total Physical Response, and more.

Each established method is supposed to have a specified set of theoretical principles and a specified set of classroom practices. One might, therefore, think that the methods listed above provide different pathways to language learning and teaching. That is not so. In fact, there is considerable overlap in their theory and practice. Sometimes, as Rivers (1991) rightly pointed out, what appears to be a radically new method is more often than not a variant of existing methods presented with "the fresh paint of a new terminology that camouflages their fundamental similarity" (p. 283). What is not a variant, however, is the myth surrounding the concept of method.

8.1.2. The Myth of Method

The established methods listed are motivated and maintained by multiple myths that have long been accepted as professional articles of faith. These myths have created an inflated image of the concept of method. Here are some of the myths:

Myth #1: *There is a best method out there ready and waiting to be discovered.* For a very long time, our profession has been preoccupied with, or as Stern

(1985) would say, obsessed with, a search for the best method—very much like Monty Python searching for the Holy Grail. We went on expedition after expedition searching for the best method. But still, the Holy Grail was not in sight, partly because, as Mackey (1965) observed, "while sciences have advanced by approximations in which each new stage results from an improvement, not rejection, of what has gone before, language-teaching methods have followed the pendulum of fashion from one extreme to the other" (p. 138). Besides, the history of methods "suggests a problematic progressivism, whereby whatever is happening now is presumed to be superior to what happened before" (*Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*, 2000, p. 278).

We thought we should be able to find that one magical method through objective analysis. Instead, we found out to our dismay that the formation and implementation of a method have to take into account many variables (such as language policy and planning, learning needs, wants and situations, learner variations, teacher profiles, etc.) most of which cannot be controlled for a systematic study. We also found out that we cannot even compare known methods to see which one works best. The last time a systematic and large-scale comparison of methods was carried out was in the late 1960s. Called the Pennsylvania Project, the experiment investigated the effectiveness of methods based on audiolingual and cognitive theories of language learning and teaching. The project revealed that, apart from the fact that method comparison was not a viable research activity, the type of methods did not really matter very much at all, even when the competing methods had been derived from competing, and mutually incompatible, theories of language learning. The result was so embarrassing, prompting the project leader to say: "these results were personally traumatic to the Project staff" (Smith, 1970, p. 271). Now we know that "objective evaluation is so difficult to implement that all attempts in the past have resulted in a wider agreement on the difficulties of doing an evaluation than on the resulting judgment on methods" (Prabhu, 1990, p. 168). But, the difficulties in analyzing and assessing a method have not prevented us from using it as a base for various aspects of language teaching, which leads us to the next myth.

Myth #2: *Method constitutes the organizing principle for language teaching*. We have all along believed, rather simplistically, that the concept of method can constitute the core of the entire language learning and teaching operations. We have treated method as an all-pervasive, all-powerful entity. It has guided the form and function of every conceivable component of language teaching including curriculum design, syllabus specifications, materials preparation, instructional strategies, and testing techniques. Take for instance, communicative language teaching. When it became fashionable, we started getting a steady stream of books on *communicative* curriculum, *com-*

municative syllabus, *communicative* tasks, *communicative* methods, *communicative* materials, *communicative* testing, and so on.

The use of method as organizing principles for language learning and teaching is unfortunate because method is too inadequate and too limited to satisfactorily explain the complexity of language learning and teaching. By concentrating excessively on method, we have ignored several other factors that govern classroom processes and practices—factors such as teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives, and institutional constraints, all of which are inextricably linked together. Each of these factors shapes and reshapes the content and character of language learning and teaching; each having a huge impact on the success or failure of any language teaching enterprise.

The uncritical acceptance of the concept of method as the organizing principle has also (mis)led us to believe that method has the capacity to cater to various learning and teaching needs, wants and situations, thus, creating yet another myth.

Myth #3: *Method has a universal and ahistorical value*. Our quest for the best method has always directed us toward finding a universal, ahistorical method that can be used anywhere and everywhere. There are several drawbacks that are inherent in this outlook. First of all, established methods are founded on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts. And, as such, they are far removed from classroom reality. Because learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous, no idealized method can visualize all the variables in advance in order to provide context-specific solutions that practicing teachers badly need in order to tackle the challenges they confront every day of their professional lives.

Secondly, our search for a universally applicable method has been predominantly and inevitably a top–down exercise. That is, the conception and construction of methods have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals. But, learners across the world do not learn a second or a foreign language for the same reason; they have different purposes, and follow different paths. Without acknowledging such a phenomenon, methods have been preoccupied with their potential global reach; and, hence, they have lacked an essential local touch.

Thirdly, and as a consequence of the conditions listed, we have completely ignored local knowledge. We forget that people have been learning and teaching foreign languages long before modern methods arrived on the scene. Teachers and teacher educators in periphery communities such as in South Asia, Southeast Asia, South America, and elsewhere have a tremendous amount of local knowledge sedimented through years and years of practical experience. But still, all the established methods are based on the

theoretical insights derived almost exclusively from a Western knowledge base. The concept of method is bereft of any synthesis of external knowledge from center-based communities and local knowledge from periphery communities. Our misplaced faith in a universally applicable method and its top–down orientation has created and sustained another myth.

Myth #4: *Theorists conceive knowledge, and teachers consume knowledge.* In the field of language teaching, there is a clearly perceptible dichotomy between theory and practice, resulting in an unfortunate division of labor between the theorist and the teacher. The relationship between the theorist and the teacher that exists today is not unlike the relationship between the producer and the consumer of a marketable commodity. Such a commercialized relationship has inevitably resulted in the creation of a privileged class of theorists and an underprivileged class of practitioners. Unfortunately, the hierarchical relationship between the theorist and the teacher has not only minimized any meaningful dialogue between them, but has also contributed to some degree of mutual disrespect.

The artificial dichotomy between theory and practice has also led us to believe that teachers would gladly follow the principles and practices of established methods. They rarely do. They seem to know better. They know that none of the established methods can be realized in their purest form in the actual classroom primarily because they are not derived from their classroom but are artificially transplanted into it. They reveal their dissatisfaction with method through their actions in the classroom. Classroom-oriented research carried out in the last two decades (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 1993a; Nunan, 1987; Swaffer, Arens, & Morgan, 1982) have revealed four interrelated facts:

- Teachers who claim to follow a particular method do not conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures at all;
- teachers who claim to follow different methods often use the same classroom procedures;
- teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different procedures, and
- teachers develop and follow in their classroom a carefully crafted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any particular method.

In other words, teachers seem to be convinced that no single theory of learning and no single method of teaching will help them confront the challenges of everyday teaching. They use their own intuitive ability and experiential knowledge to decide what works and what does not work. There is thus a significant variance between what theorists advocate and what teachers do in their classroom.

Myth #5: *Method is neutral, and has no ideological motivation.* In chapter 1, we discussed the connection between ideology and language in general. The ideological nature of English language teaching has also been well-examined (e.g., Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Ricento, 2000). In an incisive analysis of the concept of method in particular, Pennycook (1989) demonstrated how "the concept reflects a particular view of the world and is articulated in the interests of unequal power relationships" (pp. 589–590). Arguing that method represents what he calls *interested knowledge,* he showed how it "has diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching" (p. 597). Discussing the forms of resistance to such center-based interested knowledge imposed on the language classroom in periphery countries, Canagarajah (1999) called for a pedagogy in which members of the periphery communities will "have the agency to think critically and work out ideological alternatives that favor their own environment" (p. 2).

Furthermore, as I have observed elsewhere (Kumaravadivelu (2003b), the concept of method is indeed a construct of marginality. One aspect of this marginality has taken the form of gendered division in the English Language Teaching (ELT) workforce. As Pennycook (1989) suggested, the method concept "has played a major role in maintaining the gendered division of the workforce, a hierarchically organized division between male conceptualizers and female practitioners" (pp. 610–611). Another aspect has taken a broader form of native/nonnative division in the global ELT workforce, where nonnative professionals are marginalized.

Expanding on the last point, I have argued that that method as a means of marginality has four interrelated dimensions—scholastic, linguistic, cultural, and economic (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b):

- The scholastic dimension relates to the ways in which Western scholars have treated local knowledge, as discussed in Myth #3.
- The linguistic dimension relates to the ways in which methods prevent nonnative learners and teachers of English from putting to use their excellent L1 linguistic resource to serve the cause of their L2 education. It is a move that automatically privileges teachers who are native speakers of English, most of whom do not share the language of their learners. Phillipson (1992) has called it the *monolingual tenet of L2 pedagogy.*
- The cultural dimension treats second-language teaching as second culture teaching directed at helping L2 learner "gain an understanding of the native speaker's perspective" (Stern, 1992, p. 216). The overall aim is to help them develop sociocultural ability for the purpose of culturally empathizing, if not culturally assimilating, with native speakers of English.
- The economic dimension relates to the ways in which the monolingual tenet and the emphasis on culture teaching create and sustain global em-

ployment opportunities for native speakers of English, sometimes at the expense of qualified local candidates.

These four dimensions of method as a means of marginality tend to extend and expand the agenda for sustaining "an ideological dependence" (Phillipson, 1992, p. 199).

The matters raised so far, and particularly the ambiguous use of the term, method, and the multiple myths that are associated with it, have contributed to a gradual erosion of its usability as a construct in language learning and teaching, prompting some to say that the concept of method is dead.

8.1.3. The Death of Method

In 1991, the British applied linguist, Dick Allwright gave a plenary talk in a conference at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada and the talk (as well as the published version) was titled, "The Death of the Method." In choosing what he called a "deliberately contentious title," he was emphasizing "the relative unhelpfulness of the existence of 'methods'" (Allwright, 1991, p. 1). Following his lead, the American scholar, Brown, has used the imagery of death again and again (e.g., 2002). He has sought to "lay to rest" (p. 11) the concept of method, and to write a "requiem" (p. 17) for "recently interred methods" (p. 14). By opting for these colorful expressions, the two reputed scholars from across the Atlantic are not being polemical; rather, they wish to draw attention to the fact that the concept of method has lost its significance. It should no longer be considered a valuable or a viable construct in language learning and teaching. In fact, as indicated earlier, several scholars (e.g., Mackey, 1965; Stern, 1985) have made similar observations before, using less vivid phrases.

Allwright explains the "relative unhelpfulness" of the method concept by listing six reasons. To quote:

- It is built on seeing differences where similarities may be more important, since methods that are different in abstract principle seem to be far less so in classroom practice;
- it simplifies unhelpfully a highly complex set of issues, for example seeing similarities among learners when differences may be more important . . . ;
- it diverts energies from potentially more productive concerns, since time spent learning how to implement a particular method is time not available for such alternative activities as classroom task design;
- it breeds a brand loyalty which is unlikely to be helpful to the profession, since it fosters pointless rivalries on essentially irrelevant issues;

- it breeds complacency, if, as it surely must, it conveys the impression that answers have indeed been found to all the major methodological questions in our profession;
- it offers a "cheap" externally derived sense of coherence for language teachers, which may itself inhibit the development of a personally "expensive," but ultimately far more valuable, internally derived sense of coherence . . . (Allwright, 1991, pp. 7–8)

Interestingly, most of these reasons are teacher related, and can be easily linked to some of the myths of the method discussed in the above section.

Allwright's observation that the concept of method may inhibit the development of a "valuable, internally-derived sense of coherence" on the part of the classroom teacher is an important one. It has been addressed in detail by Clarke (2003), who posited "coherence" as "the ideal to strive for" but laments that the concept of method shifts the focus to something else: "it is not uncommon for the focus to shift from improving learning to improving method, not unlike the gardener who spends an inordinate amount of time building the ideal hothouse and forgets to tend to the tomatoes" (p. 128).

Teachers find it difficult to develop a "valuable, internally-derived sense of coherence" about language teaching, in part, because the transmission model of teacher education they may have undergone does little more than passing on to them a ready-made package of methods and methods-related body of knowledge. They find such a methods-based teacher education woefully inadequate to meet the challenges of the practice of everyday teaching. Therefore, in an earnest attempt "to tend to the tomatoes," they try to develop a sense of what works in the classroom and what doesn't, based on their intuitive ability and experiential knowledge. In a clear repudiation of established methods and their estranged myths, teachers try to derive a "method" of their own and call it *eclectic method.*

Constructing a principled eclectic method is not easy. As Widdowson (1990) observed, "if by eclecticism is meant the random and expedient use of whatever technique comes most readily to hand, then it has no merit whatever" (p. 50). The difficulties faced by teachers in developing an enlightened eclectic method are not hard to find. Stern (1992) pointed out some of them:

> the weakness of the eclectic position is that it offers no criteria according to which we can determine which is the best theory, nor does it provide any principles by which to include or exclude features which form part of existing theories or practices. The choice is left to the individual's intuitive judgment and is, therefore, too broad and too vague to be satisfactory as a theory in its own right. (p. 11)

As can be expected, methods-based, teacher-education programs do not make any sustained and systematic effort to develop in prospective teachers the knowledge and skill necessary to be responsibly eclectic.

The net result is that practicing teachers end up with some form of eclectic method that is, as Long writes in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (2000):

> usually little more than an amalgam of their inventors' prejudices. The same relative ignorance about SLA affects everyone, and makes the eclecticist's claim to be able to select the alleged "best parts" of several theories absurd. Worse, given that different theories by definition reflect different understandings, the resulting methodological mish-mash is guaranteed to be wrong, whereas an approach to language teaching based, in part, on one theory can at least be coherent, and, subject to the previously discussed caveats, has a chance of being right. (p. 4)

Consequently, teachers find themselves in an unenviable position where they have to straddle two pedagogic worlds: a method-based one that is imposed on them, and a methodological one that is improvised by them.

What the aforementioned discussion shows is that the concept of method has little theoretical validity and even less practical utility. Its meaning is ambiguous, and its claim dubious. Given such a checkered history, it has come to be looked on as "a label without substance" (Clarke, 1983, p. 109) that has only "diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching" (Pennycook, 1989, p. 597), resulting in the feeling that "language teaching might be better understood and better executed if the concept of method were not to exist at all" (Jarvis, 1991, p. 295). It is therefore no wonder that there is a strong sentiment to call it dead, sing a requiem, and assign it "to the dustbin" (Nunan, 1989, p. 2) of history.

For reasons discussed above, the deep discontent with the concept of method accumulating for a considerable length of time has finally resulted in the emergence of the postmethod condition. Synthesizing and expanding some of my earlier work (Kumaravadivelu, 1994b, 2001, 2002, 2003a), I briefly present the logic of *postmethod*.

8.2. THE LOGIC OF POSTMETHOD

The *postmethod condition* is a sustainable state of affairs that compels us to fundamentally restructure our view of language teaching and teacher education. It urges us to review the character and content of classroom teaching in all its pedagogical and ideological perspectives. It drives us to streamline our teacher education by refiguring the reified relationship between theory and practice. In short, it demands that we seriously contemplate the

essentials of a coherent postmethod pedagogy. I present below the essentials of postmethod pedagogy in terms of pedagogic parameters and pedagogic indicators. How these parameters and indictors can shape the construction of a postmethod pedagogy will be the subject of chapter 9.

8.2.1. Pedagogic Parameters

Postmethod pedagogy can be visualized as a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility. As will become clear, each parameter shapes and is shaped by the others. They interweave and interact with each other in a synergic relationship where the whole is much more than the sum of its parts. Let us consider each of them.

8.2.1.1. The Parameter of Particularity. The most important aspect of postmethod pedagogy is its *particularity*. That is to say, any postmethod pedagogy "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural mileu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). The parameter of particularity then rejects the very idea method-based pedagogies are founded upon, namely, there can be one set of teaching aims and objectives realizable through one set of teaching principles and procedures. At its core, the idea of pedagogic particularity is consistent with the hermeneutic perspective of *situational understanding,* which claims that a meaningful pedagogy cannot be constructed without a holistic interpretation of particular situations, and that it cannot be improved without a general improvement of those particular situations (Elliott, 1993).

The parameter of particularity emphasizes local exigencies and lived experiences. Pedagogies that ignore them will ultimately prove to be "so disturbing for those affected by them—so threatening to their belief systems—that hostility is aroused and learning becomes impossible" (Coleman, 1996, p. 11). For instance, communicative language teaching with its focus on sociocultural negotiation, expression, and interpretation (see chap. 6, this volume, for details) has created a deep sense of disillusionment in certain parts of the world. Consider the following:

- From South Africa, Chick (1996) wondered whether "our choice of communicative language teaching as a goal was possibly a sort of naive ethnocentricism prompted by the thought that what is good for Europe or the USA had to be good for KwaZulu" (p. 22).
- From Pakistan, Shamim (1996) reported that her attempt to introduce communicative language teaching into her classroom met with a great

deal of resistance from her learners, making her "terribly exhausted," leading her to realize that, by introducing this methodology, she was actually "creating psychological barriers to learning . . ." (p. 109).

- From Singapore, Pakir (1999) suggested that communicative language teaching with its professional practices based on "Anglo-Saxon assumptions" (p. 112) has to be modified taking into account what she calls "glocal" linguistic and cultural considerations.
- From India, Tickoo (1996) narrated how even locally initiated, pedagogic innovations have failed because they merely tinkered with the method-based framework inherited from abroad.

All these research reports present a classic case of a centrally produced pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. In fact, dealing with a similar situation within the United States, scholars such as Delpit (1995) and Smitherman (2000) stressed the need for a language education that is sensitive to the linguistic particularities of "nonstandard" speakers of English.

A context-sensitive language education can emerge only from the practice of particularity. It involves a critical awareness of local conditions of learning and teaching that policymakers and program administrators have to seriously consider in putting together an effective teaching agenda. More importantly, it involves practicing teachers, either individually or collectively, observing their teaching acts, evaluating their outcomes, identifying problems, finding solutions, and trying them out to see once again what works and what doesn't. In that sense, the particular is so deeply embedded in the practical, and cannot be achieved or understood without it. The parameter of particularity, therefore, merges into the parameter of *practicality*.

8.2.1.2. The Parameter of Practicality. The parameter of practicality relates broadly to the relationship between theory and practice, and narrowly to the teacher's skill in monitoring his or her own teaching effectiveness. As we discussed earlier, there is a harmful dichotomy between theory and practice, between the theorist's role and the teacher's role in education. One of the ways by which general educationists have addressed the dichotomy is by positing a distinction between professional theories and personal theories. According to O'Hanlon (1993), *professional theories* are those that are generated by experts, and are generally transmitted from centers of higher learning. *Personal theories*, on the other hand, are those that are developed by teachers by interpreting and applying professional theories in practical situations while they are on the job.

It is this distinction between theorists' theory and teachers' theory that has, in part, influenced the emphasis on action research. "The fundamental aim of action research," as Elliott (1991) makes it crystal clear, "is to im-

prove practice rather than to produce knowledge" (p. 49). The teacher is advised to do action research in the classroom by testing, interpreting, and judging the usefulness of professional theories proposed by experts. Such an interpretation of teacher research is very narrow because it leaves very little room for self-conceptualization and self-construction of pedagogic knowledge on the part of the teacher.

The parameter of practicality goes beyond such deficiencies inherent in the theory versus practice and theorists' theory versus teachers' theory dichotomies. As I have argued elsewhere (Kumaravadivelu, 1999b), if context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge has to emerge from teachers and their practice of everyday teaching, then they ought to be enabled to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. Edge (2001) made similar observations when he stated that "the thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but someone who theorizes practice" (p. 6). This objective, however, cannot be achieved simply by asking them to put into practice professional theories proposed by others. It can be achieved only by helping them develop the knowledge and skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to construct their own context-sensitive theory of practice.

A *theory of practice* is conceived when, to paraphrase van Manen (1991), there is a union of action and thought, or more precisely, when there is action in thought and thought in action. It is the result of what he has called "pedagogical thoughtfulness." In the context of deriving a theory of practice, pedagogical thoughtfulness simultaneously feeds and is fed by reflective thinking on the part of teachers. Freeman (1998) called such a reflective thinking *inquiry-oriented teacher research*, which he defines as "a state of being engaged in what is going on in the classroom that drives one to better understand what is happening—and can happen—there" (p. 14). He sees *inquiry* as something that "includes both the attitude that spawns this engagement and the energy and activity that put it into action" (p. 34). It enables them to understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative that is then subjected to further critical evaluation.

The parameter of practicality, then, focuses on teachers' reflection and action, which are also based on their insights and intuition. Through prior and ongoing experience with learning and teaching, teachers gather an unexplained and sometimes unexplainable awareness of what constitutes good teaching. Prabhu (1990) called it teachers' *sense of plausibility*. It is their "personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning, with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them" (p. 172). In a similar vein, Hargreaves (1994) called it *the ethic of practicality*—a phrase he used to refer to the teacher's

> powerful sense of what works and what doesn't; of which changes will go and which will not—not in the abstract, or even as a general rule, but for *this* teacher in *this* context. In this simple yet deeply influential sense of practicality among teachers is the distillation of complex and potent combinations of purpose, person, politics and workplace constraints. (p. 12, emphasis in original)

More than a quarter century ago, van Manen (1977) called this awareness, simply, *sense-making*.

Teachers' sense-making matures over time as they learn to cope with competing pulls and pressures representing the content and character of professional preparation, personal beliefs, institutional constraints, learner expectations, assessment instruments, and other factors. This seemingly instinctive and idiosyncratic nature of the teacher's sense-making disguises the fact that it is formed and re-formed by the pedagogic factors governing the microcosm of the classroom as well as by the larger sociopolitical forces emanating from outside. In this sense, the parameter of practicality metamorphoses into the parameter of *possibility*.

8.2.1.3. The Parameter of Possibility. The parameter of possibility owes much of its origin to the educational philosophy of the Brazilian intellectual, Paulo Freire. He and his followers (e.g., Giroux, 1988; Simon, 1988) took the position that pedagogy, any pedagogy, is closely linked to power and dominance, and is aimed at creating and sustaining social inequalities. They stress the importance of acknowledging and highlighting students' and teachers' individual identity, and they encourage them to question the status quo that keeps them subjugated. They also stress the "the need to develop theories, forms of knowledge, and social practices that *work with* the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical setting" (Giroux, 1988, p. 134, emphasis in original).

The experiences participants bring to the pedagogical setting are shaped, not just by what they experience in the classroom, but also by a broader social, economic, and political environment in which they grow up. These experiences have the potential to alter classroom aims and activities in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners or curriculum designers or textbook producers. For instance, Canagarajah (1999) reported how Tamil students of English in the civil war-torn Sri Lanka offered resistance to Western representations of English language and culture and how they, motivated by their own cultural and historical backgrounds, appropriated the language and used it in their own terms according to their own aspirations, needs, and values. He reported how the students, through marginal comments and graphics, actually reframed, reinterpreted and rewrote the content of their ESL textbooks written and produced by Anglo-

American authors. The students' resistance, Canagarajah concluded, suggests "the strategic ways by which discourses may be negotiated, intimating the resilient ability of human subjects to creatively fashion a voice for themselves from amidst the deafening channels of domination" (p. 197).

The parameter of possibility is also concerned with language ideology and learner identity. As we saw in chapter 1, more than any other educational enterprise, language education provides its participants with challenges and opportunities for a continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity; for, as Weeden (1987) pointed out "language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed" (p. 21). This is even more applicable to L2 education, which brings languages and cultures in contact. That this contact results in identity conflicts has been convincingly brought out by Norton's study of immigrant women in Canada. "The historically and socially constructed identity of learners," Norton (2000) wrote, "influences the subject position they take up in the language classroom and the relationship they establish with the language teacher" (p. 142).

Applying such a critical stance to teach English to speakers of other languages, Auerbach (1995), Benesch (2001), Morgan (1998) and others have suggested new ways of broadening the nature and scope of classroom aims and activities. More specifically, Auerbach has showed us how participatory pedagogy can bring together learners, teachers, and community activists in mutually beneficial, collaborative projects. Morgan has demonstrated how even in teaching units of language as system, such as phonological and grammatical features, the values of critical practice and community development can be profitably used. Similarly, Benesch has suggested ways and means of linking the linguistic text and sociopolitical context as well as the academic content and the larger community for the purpose of turning classroom input and interaction into effective instruments of transformation.

What follows from the aforementioned discussion is that language teachers can ill afford to ignore the sociocultural reality that influences identity formation in the classroom nor can they afford to separate the linguistic needs of learners from their social needs. They will be able to reconcile these seemingly competing forces if they "achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (van Manen, 1977, p. 222). Such a deepening awareness has a built-in quality to transform the life of the teachers themselves. Studies by Clandinin and her colleagues attest to this self-transforming phenomenon: "As we worked together we talked about ways of seeing new possibility in our practices as teachers, as teacher educators, and with children in our classroom. As we saw possibilities in our professional

lives we also came to see new possibilities in our personal lives" (Clandinin, Davis, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993, p. 209).

In sum, the three pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility constitute the conceptual foundation for a postmethod pedagogy. They have the potential to function as operating principles, guiding various aspects of L2 learning and teaching. These operating principles manifest themselves in what may be called pedagogic indicators.

8.2.2. Pedagogic Indicators

Pedagogic indicators refer to those functions and features that are considered to reflect the role played by key participants in the L2 learning and teaching operations governing postmethod pedagogy. They are conceptually consistent with the three parameters already discussed. They indicate the degree to which shared decision making is incorporated into the planning and implementation of classroom aims and activities, especially the decision-making process shared by postmethod learners, teachers, and teacher educators.

8.2.2.1. The Postmethod Learner. Postmethod pedagogy seeks to make the most use of learner investment and learner interest by giving them, to the extent feasible, a meaningful role in pedagogic decision making. As Breen and Littlejohn (2000) observed, "a pedagogy that does not directly call upon students' capacities to make decisions conveys to them that either they are not allowed to or that they are incapable of doing so; or it may convey that the more overt struggle to interpret and plan is not part of 'proper' learning" (p. 21). Postmethod pedagogy allows learners a role in pedagogic decision making by treating them as active and autonomous players.

Postmethod pedagogy takes into account two views of learner autonomy, a narrow view and a broad view (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). The narrow view seeks to develop in the learner a capacity to learn to learn whereas the broad view goes beyond that to include a capacity to learn to liberate as well. Helping learners learn to learn involves developing in them the ability to "take charge of one's own learning," (Holec, 1981, p. 3). Taking charge, according to Holec, means to (a) have and to hold the responsibility for determining learning objectives, (b) for defining contents and progressions, (c) for selecting methods and techniques to be used, (d) for monitoring the procedure of acquisition, and finally, (e) for evaluating what has been acquired.

Generally, *learning to learn* means learning to use appropriate strategies to realize desired learning objectives. In the L2 literature, one can find useful taxonomies of learning strategies (e.g., O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) as well as user-friendly manuals (e.g., Chamot, et. al., 1999;

Scharle & Szabo, 2000), which offer learners insights into what they need to know and can do to plan and regulate their learning. These sources tell us that learners use several metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies to achieve their learning objectives. They also tell us that there are many individual ways of learning a language successfully, and that different learners will approach language learning differently. We further learn that more successful learners use a greater variety of strategies and use them in ways appropriate to the language learning task, and that less successful learners not only have fewer strategy types in their repertoire, but also frequently use strategies that are inappropriate to the task.

By using appropriate learning strategies, learners can monitor their learning process and maximize their learning potential. As I have stated elsewhere (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, pp. 139–140), learners can exploit some of these opportunities by:

- Identifying their learning strategies and styles in order to know their strengths and weaknesses as language learners;
- stretching their strategies and styles by incorporating some of those employed by successful language learners;
- reaching out for opportunities for additional language reception or production beyond what they get in the classroom, for example, through library resources, learning centers and electronic media such as the Internet;
- collaborating with other learners to pool information on a specific project they are working on; and
- taking advantage of opportunities to communicate with competent speakers of the language.

Collectively, these activities help learners gain a sense of responsibility for aiding their own learning.

While the narrow view of learner autonomy treats learning to learn a language as an end in itself, the broad view treats learning to learn a language as a means to an end, the end being learning to liberate. In other words, the former stands for academic autonomy and the latter, for liberatory autonomy. If *academic autonomy* enables learners to be effective learners, *liberatory autonomy* empowers them to be critical thinkers. Thus, liberatory autonomy goes much further by actively seeking to help learners recognize sociopolitical impediments that prevent them from realizing their full human potential, and by providing them with the intellectual and cognitive tools necessary to overcome them.

More than any other educational enterprise, language teaching, where almost any and all topics can potentially constitute the content of classroom

activity, offers ample opportunities for teachers to experiment with liberatory autonomy. Meaningful liberatory autonomy can be promoted in the language classroom by, among other things:

- Encouraging learners to assume, with the help of their teachers, the role of mini-ethnographers so that they can investigate and understand how, for instance, language as ideology serves vested interests;
- asking them to reflect on their developing identities by writing diaries or journal entries about issues that engage their sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world;
- helping them in the formation of learning communities where they develop into unified, socially cohesive, mutually supportive groups seeking self-awareness and self-improvement; and
- providing opportunities for them to explore the unlimited possibilities offered by online services on the World Wide Web, and bringing back to the class their own topics and materials for discussion, and their own perspectives on those topics.

Taken together, what the two types of autonomy promise is the development of overall academic ability, intellectual competence, social consciousness, and mental attitude necessary for learners to avail opportunities, and overcome challenges both in and outside the classroom. Clearly, such a far-reaching goal cannot be attained by learners working alone; they need the willing cooperation of all others who directly or indirectly shape their educational agenda, particularly that of their teachers.

8.2.2.2. The Postmethod Teacher. The postmethod teacher is considered to be an autonomous teacher. Teacher autonomy is so central that it can be seen as defining the heart of postmethod pedagogy. Method-based pedagogy "overlooks the fund of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching which the teachers already have by virtue of their lives as students" (Freeman, 1991, p. 35). Postmethod pedagogy, on the other hand, recognizes the teachers' prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks. It also promotes the ability of teachers to know how to develop a reflective approach to their own teaching, how to analyze and evaluate their own teaching acts, how to initiate change in their classroom, and how to monitor the effects of such changes (Wallace, 1991). Such an ability can evolve only if teachers have a desire and a determination to acquire and assert a fair degree of autonomy in pedagogic decision making.

In the field of L2 education, most teachers enter into the realm of professional knowledge, with very few exceptions, through a "methods" pack-

age. That is, they learn that the supposedly objective knowledge of language learning and teaching has been closely linked to a particular method which, in turn, is closely linked to a particular school of thought in psychology, linguistics, and other related disciplines. When they begin to teach, however, they quickly recognize the limitations of such a knowledge base, and try to break away from such a constraining concept of method. In the process, they attempt, as we saw earlier, to develop their own eclectic method. In order to do that, they have to increasingly rely on their prior and evolving personal knowledge of learning and teaching.

Personal knowledge "does not simply entail behavioral knowledge of how to do particular things in the classroom; it involves a cognitive dimension that links thought with activity, centering on the context-embedded, interpretive process of knowing what to do" (Freeman, 1996, p. 99). Personal knowledge does not develop instantly before one's peering eyes, as film develops in an instant camera. It evolves over time, through determined effort. Under these circumstances, it is evident that teachers can become autonomous only to the extent they are willing and able to embark on a continual process of self-development.

Facilitating teacher self-development, to a large extent, depends on what we know about teacher cognition which is a fairly new, but a rapidly growing, professional topic in L2 teacher education. Teacher cognition, as Borg (2003) said, refers to "what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81). According to his recent state-of-the-art review, teacher cognition has been the focus of 47 research studies since 1996. Some of these studies have shed useful light on how teachers interpret and evaluate the events, activities, and interactions that occur in the teaching process, and how these interpretations and evaluations can help them enrich their knowledge, and eventually enable them to become self-directed individuals. These and other studies on teacher cognition reveal "greater understanding of the contextual factors—e.g., institutional, social, instructional, physical—which shape what language teachers do are central to deeper insights into relationships between cognition and practice" (Borg, 2003, p. 106).

A study conducted in Australia by Breen and his colleagues (Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001) clearly brings out the possible relationship between teacher beliefs, guiding principles, and classroom actions, and their unfailing impact on immediate, ongoing thinking and decision making. Consider Fig. 8.1.

Studying a group of 18 Australian teachers of English as a second language (ESL) whose teaching experience varied from 5 to 33 years, Breen et al. (2001) found that teachers' beliefs comprise a set of guiding principles that, in turn, "appeared to derive from underlying beliefs or personal theories the teachers held regarding the nature of the broader educational process, the nature of language, how it is learned, and how it may be best

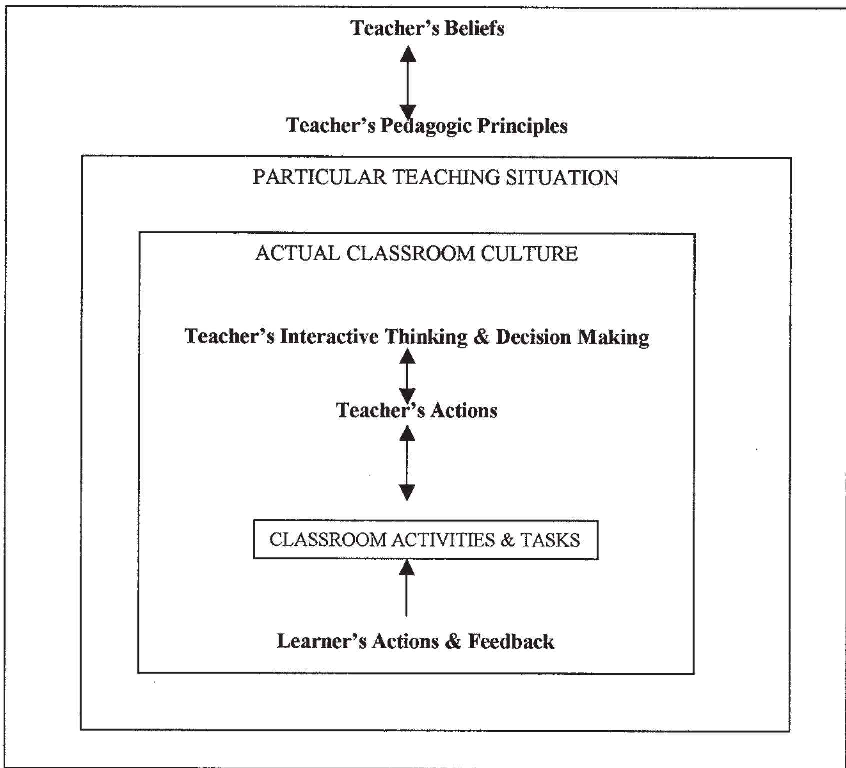

FIG 8.1. Teacher conceptualizations and classroom practices (Breen et al., 2001, p. 473).

taught" (pp. 472–473). According to them, the pedagogic principles mediate between the experientially informed teacher beliefs and the teacher's ongoing decision making and actions with a particular class of learners in a particular teaching situation. These principles are "reflexive in both shaping what the teacher does whilst being responsive to what the teacher observes about the learners' behavior and their achievements in class" (p. 473). Over time, teachers evolve a coherent pedagogic framework consisting of core principles that are applied across teaching situations. What postmethod pedagogy assumes is that this kind personal knowledge teachers develop over time will eventually lead them to construct their own theory of practice.

While the above-mentioned authors provide teachers' articulated encounters with certain aspects of particularity and practicality, scholars such as Clarke (2003), Edge (2002), and Johnston (2003) showed more recently how teachers can enlarge their vision by embracing aspects of possibility as

well. Their contributions demonstrate once again that "language teachers cannot hope to fully satisfy their pedagogic obligations without at the same time satisfying their social obligations" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 544). In other words, teachers cannot afford to remain sociopolitically naive.

Sociopolitical naiveté commonly occurs, as Hargreaves (1994) wisely warned us,

> when teachers are encouraged to reflect on their personal biographies without also connecting them to broader histories of which they are a part; or when they are asked to reflect on their personal images of teaching and learning without also theorizing the conditions which gave rise to those images and the consequences which follow from them. (p. 74)

He argued, quite rightly, that when divorced from its surrounding social and political contexts, teachers' personal knowledge can quickly turn into "parochial knowledge."

In pursuing their professional self-development, postmethod teachers perform teacher research involving the triple parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. Teacher research is initiated and implemented by them, and is motivated mainly by their own desire to self-explore and self-improve. Contrary to common misconception, doing teacher research does not necessarily involve highly sophisticated, statistically laden, variable-controlled experimental studies for which practicing teachers have neither the time nor the energy. Rather, it involves keeping one's eyes, ears, and minds open in the classroom to see what works and what doesn't, with what group(s) of learners, for what reason, and assessing what changes are necessary to make instruction achieve its desired goals. Teachers can conduct teacher research by developing and using investigative capabilities derived from the practices of exploratory research (Allwright, 1993), teacher-research cycle (Freeman, 1998), and critical classroom discourse analysis (Kumaravadivelu, 1999a, 1999b).

The goal of teacher research is achieved when teachers exploit and extend their intuitively held pedagogic beliefs based on their educational histories and personal biographies by conducting a more structured and more goal-oriented teacher research based on the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. Most part of such teacher research is doable if, as far as possible, it is not separated from and is fully integrated with day-to-day teaching and learning. As Allwright (1993) argued, language teachers and learners are in a privileged position to use class time for investigative purposes as long as the activities are done through the medium of the target language being taught and learned. To successfully carry out investigative as well as instructional responsibilities thrust on them by the postmethod condition, teachers, no doubt, need the services of committed teacher educators.

8.2.2.3. The Postmethod Teacher Educator. "Mainstream approaches to teacher education in TESOL," as Pennycook (2004) pointed out, "have frequently lacked a social or political dimension that helps locate English and English language teaching within the complex social, cultural, economic, and political environments in which it occurs" (p. 335). That is because most models of teacher education are designed to transmit a set of preselected and presequenced body of knowledge from the teacher educator to the prospective teacher. This is essentially a top–down approach in which teacher educators perceive their role to be one of engineering the classroom teaching of student teachers, offering them suggestions on the best way to teach, modeling appropriate teaching behaviors for them, and evaluating their mastery of discrete pedagogic behaviors through a capstone course called *practicum* or *practice teaching*. Such a transmission model of teacher education is hopelessly inadequate to produce self-directing and self-determining teachers who constitute the backbone of any postmethod pedagogy.

The task of the postmethod teacher educator is to create conditions for prospective teachers to acquire necessary authority and autonomy that will enable them to reflect on and shape their own pedagogic experiences, and in certain cases transform such experiences. In other words, it becomes necessary to have teacher education that does not merely pass on a body of knowledge, but rather one that is dialogically constructed by participants who think and act critically. In other words, the interaction between the teacher educator and the prospective teacher should become dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense (Kumaravadivelu, 1999b). According to Bakhtin (1981), interaction is "dialogic" when all the participants to an interactional exchange have the authority and the autonomy to express their voice and exhibit their identity. A dialogue, controlled by one individual, is "monologic" even if two or more individuals take part in it. Dialogic discourse, then, facilitates an interaction between meanings, between belief systems; an interaction that produces what Bakhtin calls, "a responsive understanding." In such a dialogic enterprise, the primary responsibility of the teacher educator is not to provide the teacher with a borrowed voice, however enlightened it may be, but to provide opportunities for the dialogic construction of meaning out of which an identity or voice may emerge.

From a postmethod perspective, teacher education is treated not as the experience and interpretation of a predetermined, prescribed pedagogic practice, but rather as an ongoing, dialogically constructed entity involving critically reflective participants. When teacher education is dialogic, a series of actions ensue: through purposeful interactions, channels of communication between student-teachers and teacher-educators open-up. Student teachers actively and freely use the linguistic, cultural and pedagogic capital they bring with them. Teacher educators show a willingness to use the

student teacher's values, beliefs, and knowledge as an integral part of the learning process. When all this happens, the entire process of teacher education becomes reflective and rewarding.

In practical terms, what this discussion means is that the role of the postmethod teacher educator becomes one of:

- Recognizing and helping student teachers recognize the inequalities built into the current teacher education programs, which treat teacher educators as producers of knowledge, and practicing teachers as consumers of knowledge;
- enabling prospective teachers to articulate their thoughts and experience, and share with other student teachers in class their evolving personal beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge about language learning and teaching at the beginning, during, and at the end of their teacher education program;
- encouraging prospective teachers to think critically so that they may relate their personal knowledge with the professional knowledge they are being exposed to, monitor how each shapes and is shaped by the other, assess how the generic professional knowledge could be used to derive their own personal theory of practice;
- creating conditions for student teachers to acquire basic, classroom-discourse analytical skills that will help them understand the nature of classroom input and interaction;
- rechannelizing part of their own research agenda to do what Cameron, Frazer, Harvey, Rampton, and Richardson (1992) called "empowering research," that is, research *with* rather than *on* their student teachers; and
- exposing student teachers to a pedagogy of possibility by helping them critically engage authors who have raised our consciousness about power and politics, ideas and ideologies that inform L2 education.

These are, no doubt, challenging tasks. Unfortunately, most of the current teacher education programs are unable to meet these challenges. The programs require a fundamental restructuring that transforms an information-oriented teacher education into an inquiry-oriented one.

8.3. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been threefold: first, to deconstruct the existing concept of method; second, to describe the antimethod sentiments; and third, to delineate the emerging postmethod condition. I have pointed out that the concept of method is beset with ambiguous meanings and mul-

tiple myths, and, as a result, has lost much of its significance. I have also stressed that a greater awareness of its limitations among a growing section of the professional community has caused the emergence of what has been called the postmethod condition.

I have argued that any postmethod pedagogy must take into account the pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The first relates to the advancement of a context-sensitive pedagogy based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. The second seeks to enable and encourage teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize. And the third emphasizes the importance of larger social, political, educational, and institutional forces that shape identity formation and social transformation. The boundaries of the particular, the practical, and the possible are blurred as they shape and are shaped by the others.

I have also suggested that the three parameters have the potential to provide the organizing principles for the construction of a context-sensitive pedagogic framework. This potential opens up unlimited opportunities for the emergence of various types of postmethod pedagogies that are sensitive to various learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations. In chapter 9, I describe three recent attempts at formulating the basics of postmethod pedagogy that transcend the limitations of the concept of method in different ways.