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ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA: CONTRIBUTING TO EQUITY IN EDUCATION

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Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been criticised on some counts both here and abroad. One of the reasons is that it is open to a number of interpretations. Another is its uncertain theoretical base. However, perhaps the most significant reason is that criticism of an approach or method in the course of time is natural and helpful. The adoption of outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa requires certain adaptations and redefinition of language teaching. This article argues that CLT is appropriate to the needs of OBE, and highlights some of the aspects which must be reviewed if the needs of the majority of children are to be met.

Verskeie aspekte van Kommunikatiewe-taalonderrig is hier en in die buiteland gekritiseer. Een van die redes is dat dit op verskillende maniere geïnterpreteer kan word. Nog 'n rede is die vae teoretiese basis daarvan. Nogtans is die mees betekenisvolle rede miskien dat kritiek van 'n benadering of metode met verloop van tyd 'n natuurlike proses is en nuttig kan wees. Die aanvaarding van OBE in SA vereis sekere aanpassings en 'n herdefiniëring van taalonderrig. Hierdie artikel stel die standpunt dat KTO vir die behoeftes van OBE toepaslik is en lig sommige van die aspekte uit wat hersien sal moet word as daar aan die behoeftes van die meerderheid kinders voldoen wil word.

1. INTRODUCTION

Although Communicative language teaching (CLT) is still widely acknowledged as the current 'best' approach, it has been subjected to a wide range of criticisms throughout the world. At a time when education is being transformed in South Africa in the interests of equity, it is important to re-examine CLT to see whether it can meet the new demands that will be made on language teachers. This paper argues for the retention of CLT on the grounds that it does offer an appropriate means of meeting the challenges of establishing a more equitable educational system in South Africa. First, an attempt is made to outline some of the reasons why CLT has attracted criticism and to dispel some of the myths which surround it. Next, an attempt is made to redefine the role of the English teacher and to explore some related concepts such as 'learner-centred' and 'learning-centred'. Special emphasis will fall on the need for mediation. Finally,

features of CLT will be highlighted to show that it does provide a 'fit' for outcomes-based education (OBE).

2. A CRITIQUE OF CLT

Any disciplined discussion of CLT theory or practice must start from the recognition that there are a variety of interpretations of what constitutes CLT. Richards and Rogers (1986) describe the widely varying practices which have resulted in terms of the 'strong' and the 'weak' version. However, it might be more accurate to speak in terms of versions along a continuum. These versions can be seen either as signs of a remarkable ability to meet the demands of a variety of contexts flexibility or as clear evidence that one cannot properly speak of CLT. Dubin and Olshtain (1986:69), for instance, say 'as with the tale of the five blind mice who touched separate parts of an elephant and so each described something else, the word 'communicative' has been applied so broadly that it has come to have different meanings for different people.'

2.1 CLEARING UP CONCEPTS

The lack of definition of the term 'communicative' is problematic. Although at its best it sustains a rich interpretation of success in using a language, at its worst it leads to confusion of purpose and a narrow interpretation of success as communication at the most basic level. This and many of the other criticisms that can be levelled against CLT can be related to its initial development as a counter to audiolingualism. Rather than being a practical outcome of a learning theory which would have provided some rigour in interpretation, it has *post hoc* come to be associated with learning theories found to be compatible with it (Richards and Rogers, 1986).

Seminal terms like *communicative competence* are still in the process of being defined (cf Cazden, 1996). Hymes and others like Savignon independently arrived at the term *communicative competence* (cf Ridge 1992) in drawing a distinction between a focus on communication (or meaning) and atomistic attention to form. Much later there was an attempt to give content to the terms (Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983). Attempts continue to be made to spell out the elements that constitute *communicative competence* and to make it possible to apply these to a language learning programme (cf Bachman 1990; Brown 1994, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyeu & Thurrell, 1995). However, these attempts to ensure that the language curriculum would be more complex have been undercut by a reductionist use of the term *communicative competence* to suggest comprehensibility.

Other concepts have been seen as dichotomous. Although Brumfit (1984) intends *fluency* and *accuracy* to be seen as part of a rich and complex continuum, the terms have been used to set up opposing objectives.

Another false dichotomy is that between form and focus. It has fuelled the notion that CLT rejects grammar teaching, which developed largely because of the pervasive influence of

Krashen (1982) who saw little value in formal instruction. A proponent of the Natural Approach rather than CLT, he argues that *comprehensible input* is sufficient for acquisition. Taking a non-interface position, he allows for only a peripheral role for conscious learning in his Monitor Theory. In recent years there has been increasing support for a view of form and meaning as interrelated rather than discrete aspects. There is now a strong movement within CLT for a recognition of the value of grammar.

2.2 THE PLACE OF GRAMMAR IN CLT

Widdowson (1990) argues strongly that a rejection of grammar as an essential part of meaning would be inconsistent with a sophisticated view of communication. For him, language is a 'medium for the demonstration of meaning potential but this can only be realised by mediation' (p.123). Furthermore, he highlights the advantages of the classroom in 'short-circuiting the slow process of natural discovery' as arrangements for learning can be made more easily and more efficiently than in 'natural surroundings' (p. 162).

A number of researchers, including those working in South Africa, have presented findings which show that formal instruction can increase the rate of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1990, 1994; Fotos, 1994; Lightbrown, Spada and White, 1993; Williams, 1995). Others have shown that while comprehensible input is necessary, it is not sufficient (cf Long). Convincing evidence for this view is provided by the fact that immersion programmes in Canada (arguably the closest to a Natural Approach) do not ensure a high level of competence. It must be emphasised that this argument for grammar teaching makes a distinction between a focus on form (as part of meaning) and a focus on forms (discrete items). The inclusion of grammar, therefore is essentially in the interests of strengthening the learner's competence in making meaning.

It has been difficult for South African teachers to keep pace with this particular debate. Two factors which have contributed to this are a lack of in-service training, and a tendency on the part of education departments to present a dogmatic and limiting position in syllabuses. Without substantial in-service courses, most teachers have relied on syllabuses and textbooks for guidance. These, however, are not theoretically informed in their attitude to grammar. While emphasising the centrality of meaning, they provide structures and functions. Kilfoil (1990: 21) has highlighted the teacher's dilemma : "If both the syllabus writers and the textbook writers vacillate on the grammar issue, how must the teacher feel?" Van der Merwe (1994) and Jessop (1993) both reveal similar uncertainties among teachers.

3. CLT AND OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION

In South Africa the move to outcomes-based education is an attempt to obtain equity in the educational system. I would argue that 'learner participation in communicative events' (Savignon 1990: 210), a key tenet of CLT, must remain central to such an endeavour. However,

some directed attention to language use and usage will be essential. In other words, what is required is an approach informed by the most sophisticated CLT theory. Successful address to the needs of the learners cannot be achieved by a return to exercises which use discrete sentences to focus on specific language items and treat knowledge of these grammatical items as 'outcomes.' CLT grammar teaching is always contextualised.

Although there is not a full communicative grammar, enough is available from a variety of fields such as conversation analysis, communicative competence research, interlanguage analysis, sociolinguistics, pragmatics and critical discourse analysis to make it possible to detail content of a CLT curriculum in a systematic and coherent way. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1995 have made a very promising contribution towards meeting the practical needs of the classroom within a sound theoretical framework in refining and extending the models of Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983. They identify five competences which jointly constitute communicative competence: discourse, strategic, sociocultural, linguistic and actional. All are informed by grammar. They have detailed the language areas that fall under each one in order to give a fairly comprehensive checklist of language points as well as a content base for syllabus design. Other work which is useful is the work on a grammar of spoken English (McCarthy and Carter, 1995). Their work emphasises the role grammar can play in empowering learners. A greater consciousness of the choices available, will make it less likely that CLT will confuse appropriacy with middle-class sensibilities (cf Peirce, 1989 which highlights the possible dangers inherent in CLT).

It is essential that a distinction be made between a traditional approach to grammar teaching and the need to integrate the learning of grammar into the curriculum in a systematic way. Teachers could make use of a variety of techniques to enhance use of language varying from consciousness-raising (cf Rutherford 1989 and Sharwood Smith) to pedagogic tasks combined with a systematic focus on form (Long and Crookes, 1992) to games which allow for practice (cf Celce-Murcia). This is particularly important for pupils who have only limited exposure to English, and is crucial for the success of OBE in a South African setting. Few pupils in South African schools can be exposed to the 'massive' comprehensible input said to promote the learning of language items incidentally. The demands of equity, then, make it essential that the advantages of the classroom be exploited.

4. A NEED FOR A REDEFINITION OF THE TEACHERS ROLE

A crucial issue for OBE is its understanding of the role of the teacher. For the purposes of this paper, two key terms are *facilitator* and *mediator*.

4.1 FACILITATION, THE LEARNER AND LEARNING-CENTREDNESS

In SA, as in other parts of the world, the role of the teacher has predominantly been presented as that of a facilitator. However, what should be a very demanding role is often reduced in common

discourse to a 'nothing or not much to do' role as evidenced by the frequent references to teachers becoming 'mere' facilitators. It is crucial to the success of OBE that a more complex content be given to this term. Harmer (1994) provides a starting point in describing the teacher's role in terms of a continuum between 'controller' and 'facilitator'. This suggests that instruction, or the provision of structured input, for instance, be narrowly confined to a controller position. Lamb and Nunan (1996) provide for less constraint in contextualising facilitation as appropriate choices for the range of activities from high-structure or low-structure. In my view, however, the term requires bolder interpretation. Apart from the boredom for pupils that would result from an undiluted diet of groupwork, it is important for the teacher to be fully used as a resource. The need to reject the notion that in the classroom the teacher is the source of all knowledge should not lead to a notion that the teacher must not be used as a source of information. Pupils who use well-directed questions to access information from the teacher are not illustrating their dependence: they are functioning autonomously. Furthermore, pupils should not be denied the advantages of having a teacher who is an effective transmitter of information or instructor or a good story-teller. There is an obvious modelling role for the teacher which mediates competence. Any of these roles could be the means of effective facilitation. What ultimately determines whether the activities could legitimately be described as facilitative or not in an OBE curriculum should be the extent to which the activities can be described as being directed towards learning outcomes. This is not difficult to determine. However, determining whether the activities are *learner-centred* is less easy.

Learner-centredness has become a buzz word, so it is particularly important to be clear about the implications of the concept before continuing this discussion. First, true learner-centredness is elusive. As Nunan (1988: 177) points out, 'no curricula can claim to be truly learner-centred unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account'. Learner-centred approaches do not exclude the teacher from playing a strong role, but they do require a significant shift in focus. Whereas teacher-centred approaches aim at directing the learners along a well signposted course, learner-centred approaches see the needs of the learner as paramount. The teacher's chief role is to ensure that the learner's needs are identified and that the necessary materials or activities or instructions (appropriately tailored to the specific requirements) are provided in a setting which creates a 'starring' role for the learner. In other words, it places the onus on the teacher to create the optimal conditions for the learner to learn. The ideal learner may be described as an 'executive', who is able to make and carry out conscious decisions on the appropriate action and to monitor the action or future decisions in terms of what has been learnt, and then adjust his or her thinking or future actions accordingly (Carrell *et al* 1988). These decisions are based on both reflective and analytical thinking and influenced by feelings or attitudes (see below), and they require an inner locus of control. If the pupils are to be actively engaged they must identify with the purpose at hand. There are a number of attitudes which appear to play a key role in successful learning. A few of the most salient are outlined below:

- Learners have to believe that learning is an important activity with demonstrable usefulness.

- Learners must have strong sense of curiosity, with a desire to know how things work, for instance, or to understand the broader relevance of a 'new' piece of information.
- Learners must be willing to respect other opinions but to have an opinion of their own (as well as the ability to justify it in a calm and rational way).
- Learners must be prepared to invest time and effort in their own work (which depends on their feeling that they 'own' what they do).

Nunan (1988) makes the point that the strong view of learner-centredness demands that pupils be consulted on what they want to learn and how they want to go about learning it. This is clearly not feasible in the large classes which are the norm in South African schools. Further, it is paradoxically true that learners have to be systematically educated about what it means to be a learner, until they reach a stage where they are able to make informed decisions. Opportunities must be created for them to obtain the knowledge and skills which enable them to be independent and autonomous. In this context, it is useful to start with the notion of learning-centredness.

Nunan and Lamb (1996:10) point out that 'Learning-centredness is ... designed to lead to learner-centredness'. Pursuing the point, I would argue that grammar teaching and metacognitive strategies designed to enable pupils to engage interactively with a text in an individual (as well as social) process of reconstruction are illustrations of the ways in which learning-centredness serves learner-centredness. Both of the processes mentioned empower learners to produce or read text for their own purposes at a high level of competence.

In examining what learner-centred means, Nunan (1995) takes us from theory to complex description in which learning is the paramount concern. He suggests that learner-centredness can be implemented at a number of different levels, and presents the continuum from relatively less learner-centred to relatively more learner-centred in a series of tables (See Fig.1). Table 1 represents the ideal.

Table 1 Learner roles in a learner-centred curriculum

Curriculum stage	*Role of the Learner*
Planning	Learners are consulted on what they want to learn and how they want to go about learning. An extensive process of needs analysis facilitates this process. Learners are involved in setting, monitoring and modifying the goals and objectives of the programs being designed for them.
Implementation	Learners' language skills develop through the learners actively using and reflecting on language inside and outside the classroom. They are also involved in creating their own learning tasks and learning data.
Assessment and evaluation	Learners monitor and assess their own progress. They are also actively involved in the evaluation and modification of teaching and learning through the course and after it has been completed.

Table 2 Learner-centredness in the experiential content domain

Level	*Learner Action*	*Gloss*
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the course.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals and objectives from a range of alternatives on offer.
3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning program.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of the classroom and the world beyond the classroom.

Table 3 Learner-centredness in the learning process domain

Level	*Learner action*	*Gloss*
1	Awareness	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners make choices among a range of options.
3	Intervention	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Figure 1 (From Nunan and Lamb 1996:10-12)

In the light of Nunan's analysis, it would seem that learner/learning-centred would be a more useful term to describe the ideal classroom in an OBE context. In order to effect this transition, I believe that teachers will have to become effective mediators.

4.2 TEACHERS AS MEDIATORS

Few teachers would describe the pupils in their classes as eager to learn and confident of their success. In order to transform the situation, classroom teachers must have a way of encouraging participation, motivating pupils and arousing the interest of pupils. They must also be able to elicit their pupils confidence in them as competent models. Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning experience is useful in teasing out what this might involve. He lists ten *criteria* which provide the instrument by which mediation can be effected. These have been used extensively in South Africa (see, for example, Mentis and Frielieck 1993) to enable pupils and students to reveal their potential:

1. Mediation of intentionality and reciprocity (making the content understandable and accessible and motivating learners)
2. Mediation of transcendance (promoting transfer of knowledge, by connecting ideas and concepts to everyday situations or other subjects)
3. Mediation of meaning (locating the learning within a meaningful context)
4. Mediation of feelings of competence (instilling a belief in the learner that he or she is able to succeed)
5. Mediated regulation and control of behaviour (promoting an awareness of the need for controlled and planned behaviour)
6. Mediated sharing behaviour (encouraging sensitivity and co-operative learning)
7. Mediation of individuation (promoting autonomy and independence)
8. Mediation of goal seeking, goal setting, goal planning (helping pupils to set, plan and meet goals)
9. Mediation of challenge (empowering learners to search for challenges and encouraging creative and original approach)
10. Mediation of self-change (encouraging self-evaluation or individual progress)

(Adapted from Feuerstein *et al*: 1988: 263)

For teachers to put these kinds of mediation into effect, specific training will have to be given in an extensive in-service programme. This will equip teachers to help their pupils achieve the desired learning outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

This brief discussion has attempted to highlight some of the ways in which teachers will need to adapt their approach to meet the new demands. All of the suggestions fall fully within a Communicative Approach. I believe there are two reasons for this. One is that in its essence

CLT is a richly flexible means of meeting the interests of learners, and secondly it privileges the creation or negotiation of meaning. Throughout, the learner must engage in activities which require him to construct meaning her/ himself. Ideally the activities would not be graded but would draw on accessible texts of a variety of levels. This approach can mediate outcomes-based education. With its strong focus on problem-solving, it encourages the ability to behave in a systematic, logical way, consciously making decisions based on mind, feeling and will. The executive functions desired as an outcome depend on the learner's being able both to perceive the nature of a situation or problem and to recognise the best of the possible solutions or responses to it.

In sum, Communicative Language Teaching should be retained, but the role of the teacher should be redefined to provide a richer repertoire of knowledge, competencies, and modalities as well as strategies and techniques for the teacher and the pupil to call upon.

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