View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by Academy Publication Online

ISSN 1799-2591
Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 586-591, March 2016
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0603.18

Preparing for a Postmethod Pedagogy: A Transformative Approach to Curriculum Development

Arash V. Naeini
College of Foreign Languages and Literature, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Nima Shakouri
Roudbar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran

***Abstract*—The three parameters of postmethod pedagogy proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2001), particularly a pedagogy of possibility, are in line with and drew on the works of such critical pedagogists as Giroux (1988) whose idea of transformative intellectuals viewed it rightful for every individual teacher and learner to actively participate in the process of learning with their entire social, economic and political experiences; and even make reformations to the direction of pedagogy based on their understanding. However, curriculum development, as an integral part of pedagogy, may inhibit this transformative and dynamic learning by restricting teachers to set and prefabricated materials and guidelines. Nonetheless, teachers play a pivotal role in the realization of this transformative process since they are the executive recipients of curricula. This paper is an attempt to shed light on a transformative approach to curriculum development and holds, a transformative approach to curriculum development requires teachers to have a hand in curriculum development when they are invited by the curriculum to act so; and adapt or transform the curriculum when they are constrained by it.**

***Index Terms*—curriculum, possibility, postmethod pedagogy, transformative intellectuals**

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Giroux (1988) raised the issue of transformative intellectuals in reaction to the long-lived perception of teachers as high-level technicians who were trained only to transmit the information they were dictated by experts far removed from the realities of classroom context. In fact, Giroux criticized a top-down attitude toward pedagogy which regarded teachers as merely a means of transmitting the prefabricated and pre-sequenced materials developed by professionals (Zeichner, 1983). This conformist approach towards education had propagated a widespread passivity among teachers and students alike. That is, teachers were trained to be passive and not to question the fundamental principles of what they were required to teach (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Kumaravadivelu (2001) addressed this top-down perspective which had led to a gap between practice and theory (Elliott, 1991) by elaborating on a pedagogy of practicality. A pedagogy of practicality maintains teachers, as the producers of context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge, should be encouraged to extract theory from what they practice and practice what they hypothesize. In other words, a theory of practice will remain at the theory level and prove impractical unless it is produced as a result of practice. Therefore, a pedagogy of practicality seeks a theory of practice which is produced by teachers rather than a professional theory tailored by experts (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

Moreover, the curriculum of a top-down pedagogy was designed and developed accordingly in order to avoid possible disobedience on the part of teachers. Teachers received “teacher-proof packages” from “professional experts” and transmitted them to their students (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). On the other hand, teachers can hardly think of any possibility of change if they are either overloaded with a lot of lessons to teach and a deadline to meet, or simply when they are not invited by the lesson to participate. Obviously, this trait of submissiveness passed down from teachers to students who were influenced by the superior. In such circumstances, even the evaluation system could be influenced, consequently declaring only satisfying results for the dictated education. Schick’s division (1971 as cited in Kiely& Rea-Dickins, 2005) sheds light on this issue. He divides the evaluation system of his time into five groups: 1. Eyewash evaluation: to make a program look good. 2. Whitewash evaluation: to cover over the failure of a favored programmer. 3. Submarine evaluation: to sink an unpopular programmer. 4. Posture evaluation: to satisfy a condition of funding and 5. Postponement evaluation: to put off the need to act (p. 947). Therefore, it can be concluded that such educational systems, in their entirety (pedagogy a term used by Kumaravadivelu, 2001) leave little room, if any, for teachers’ active participation.

Apart from a dictating curriculum, the concept of method played a crucial role in the actualization of a conformist education. While Ommagio (1986) criticized methods as “…a ‘prepackaged’ set of procedures to which everyone is expected to slavishly subscribe” (p.44), Pennycook (1989) went a step further to chide the broader scope of harm that

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION

the concept of method brought about. He elaborated how the concept of method accredited the "interested knowledge" of one particular group and became the source of sociocultural and political inequities. Consequently, the promulgated conformity leads to an uncritical and unproductive society that only consumes "the interested knowledge" it is fed by a group of so-called professionals. In such a community stagnation rules the time and transformation is only regarded as unprofessional since it may disturb the order reached by approved frameworks and standards. In short, the concept of method as Wolin (1969) argues "avoids fundamental criticism and fundamental commitment" (p. 1068). This means since a method-based approach gives no space to teachers to question the validity of methods, therefore, they will not, or cannot conform to its principles and procedures, considering the complexities surrounding and affecting teaching and learning. Accordingly, Prabhu (1990) and Larsen-Freeman (2011) consider the idea of a best method very implausible.

As a result of rising dissatisfaction with methods, teachers began to resort to an eclectic method which allowed them to exploit the best part of every method and subsequently apply it in the classroom according to the context they were situated in. However, as Kumaravadivelu (2003) pinpoints eclectic method did not alter the nature of method, but only searched for an "alternative method". What Kumaravadivelu (2003), however, proposed as a solution, and one of the three attributes of postmethod pedagogy, was for teachers to seek an "alternative to method". In other terms, this means that practitioners should be empowered to free themselves from the shackles of a method-based ideology and formulate their own theories of practice congruent with their context.

II. The Significance of the Teacher's Role

Teachers are the center of the educational universe. Every pedagogical, curricular, and administrative effort in this realm revolves around teachers. As a matter of fact, one could argue that the whole destiny of education falls into the hands of teachers. Elliott (1994) contends the quality of the education that learners receive is determined by the quality of the teachers presenting it. Teachers can either turn a neglecting eye to all the days and nights of educational work, or, conversely, land these academic contributions on the goal spot and lead the universe of education to, as Giroux contends, a transformative destination wherein the participants are constantly reforming and promoting intellectually. It is very ironic that teachers can be both as noble and mighty as the rulers of the entire educational land, or as undignified and powerless as crowned heads of nowhere, desperately acting as imitators and transmitters of knowledge.

Despite the significance of teachers' role, a teacher's performance in a classroom is observable only shortly before they close the classroom door. However, afterwards, no one can conjecture what occurs within the four walls, considering the fact that the monitoring system is still not systematic enough to have this under control, and that the teachers can simply evade the regularities they dislike by acting as law-abiding teachers in monitoring sessions. Throughout our educational years of experience, we have all seen teachers who consciously neglect the goals of the curriculum they are committed to follow. Freeman (1996) summarizes research on teachers' planning and observes, "[Teachers] did not naturally think about planning in the organized formats which they had been taught to use in their professional training. Further, when they did plan lessons according to these formats, they often did not teach them according to plan" (p. 97). Also Richards (2001) highlights "Many things can be done to create a context for good teaching, but it is teachers themselves who ultimately determine the success of a program" (p. 209). Hence, the significance of a teacher's role decentralizes all the other educational roles such as the role of curriculum, the role of textbooks and instructional materials. However, as Giroux, a leading figure in critical pedagogy, argues these decentralized roles are wrongfully playing central roles in education.

III. Transformative Intellectuals

Giroux (1988) contends teachers are generally perceived as "high-level technicians carrying out dictates and objectives decided by experts far removed from the everyday realities of classroom life" (p.121). Zeichner (1983), too, agrees that teachers have become "the passive recipients of professional knowledge." Apart from educational factors, there are also non-educational influences which have taken over. Dewey (1916), who was able to subtly recognize "institutional idealistic philosophies" of the nineteenth century, in his book titled *Democracy and Education* pinpoints the absolute power of state officials and authorities over the educational system to train students, from the elementary grades to university degrees, as patriotic citizens and soldiers who would later defend the political and industrial boundaries of the country. Later, in 1930, Dewey stresses the dominant influence of global market on education and states "The business mind, having its own conversation and language, its own interests, its own intimate groupings…determine the tone of society at large..." (p. 41, as cited in Giroux, 2009, p.1). One can conclude from these statements that, in such an educational system both teachers and students are treated as passive inferiors in a hierarchy of intellectuals whose self-identity are seen as unnecessary or at times dangerous. In one instance in the UK, the government attempted to interpret the role of teachers as a "conspiracy against society" (Elliott, 1994). Still, after about a century from Dewey's discussion, Giroux (2009) argues that these oppressing forces have continued to exist in the form of a market-based rationality which looks down on democracy and "publicly engaged teaching and scholarship" (p. 2). He continues that authoritarianism has found new forms to control public life. For instance, citizenship has been reduced to consumerism as a result of rapid growth of global markets. (Giroux, 2005)

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION

In response to this conformist attitude towards education, Dewey (1916) proposes a progressive ideology in which the "very idea of education is [seen] as freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims." (p. 103). Later Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) speak of the appearance of a new approach to education in the 1960s, postmodern education, which initially built on progressive ideas, but that later constructed its own principles. Both progressivism and postmodern education sought relevance between theoretical knowledge and practice (Kumaravadivelu named this relationship a pedagogy of practicality, 2001). However, as Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue "For progressives, practice was the test of truth, and was understood as a vital pedagogical tool, but they largely ignored its transformative role" (p. 15). Giroux (1988) describes transformative intellectuals as people who "critically examine the world and its processes, including the political and educational institutions that maintain social inequalities, and subsequently, transform it" (p. 121). Meanwhile, in this transformative approach "students must engage knowledge as border-crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power" (Giroux, 2005, p. 22). In this sense, students will become "critical, active citizens." (Giroux, 1988). Kumaravadivelu (2001) describes this aspect of postmethod pedagogy as the "parameter of possibility" which is derived principally from "the works of critical pedagogists of Freirean persuasion" (p. 542). He elaborates that critical pedagogists believe the philosophy behind the implementation of any type of pedagogy is to bring about and then maintain "social inequalities." Therefore, they struggle for the realization of "teachers' and learners' subject positions." (p.542)

Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) continue that from a postmodern view, curriculum can best boost learning provided that school knowledge develops from the tacit knowledge based on the cultural resources which students already have in their possession. As opposed to practices that teach such unrelated disciplines as math, literature, geography, and history without a critical viewpoint during a school day, a postmodern teacher strives to combine these knowledges into a number of projects decided cooperatively with students (p.15). Consequently, one could argue that pedagogy cannot be influenced unless we have a holistic approach to it, attempting to understand and consider all the particular situations that may affect it in some way (Elliott, 1993 as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

IV. Curriculum Development

In 2006, Richards acknowledges "Educational publication is, after all, a business," and materials writers are faced with the challenge to both provide materials in accordance with "educational objectives and standards" and at the same time satisfy the needs of market (p.23). During their service in institutions or schools, teachers are constantly provided with materials designed by materials writers who should consider the interests of the government and the market they are writing for. Additionally, training courses and sessions usually aim to train teachers in a way to persuade them to follow the recipe of the curriculum. Consequently, this negligence of democratic difference among individuals will lead to teachers, and as a result, students who think uncritically and become passive citizens. However, the once popular idea that a teacher's role is to transfer materials from the curriculum to the students has been substituted by the realization that teachers possess "complex mental lives" that influence "what and how teachers teach" (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 176). These complex mental lives are called teacher cognition (Freeman: 2001).

One such realization which led to a more active approach to curriculum development than that of a transmission model, encouraged teachers to adhere to the principles of postmethod pedagogy as elaborated by Kumaravadivelu (1994). Post-method teaching does not follow the prescriptions of any methods or any fixed syllabi, but that which depends on every teacher's own understanding of language, language learning and teaching, the practical knowledge and skills teachers gain as a result of their training and experience, the teacher's awareness of the learners' needs, enthusiasm and learning styles, "as well as the teacher's understanding of the teaching context" (Richards, 2013, p. 18). An Example of this post-method approach to curriculum development can be found in the Central Design of curriculum development proposed by Richards in 2013. He contends research on teachers' performances shows that teachers frequently adopt a central design approach when planning their lessons by "first considering the activities and teaching procedures they will use" (p. 14). This type of curriculum development, Richards contends should commence with determining "the processes of inquiry and deliberation" that impact on teaching and learning–such processes as "investigation, decision-making reflection, discussion, interpretation, critical thinking, making choices, co-operating with others and so on." Content is selected depending on whether it helps advance the application of these processes, and the results need not be defined in any degree of detail (p. 15). Education, in this sense, Richards (2013) maintains is "successful to the extent that it makes the behavioural outcomes of the students unpredictable" (p. 15). This means learner's individual needs are respected and the teacher's role is to provide for the flourishing of their unique ideas through critical thinking.

In one sense, the entire curriculum design process, "that is environmental analysis, needs analysis, setting principles and goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation, monitoring and assessment, and evaluation, can be applied to something as small as an activity in a lesson" (Nation & Macalister, 2010, p. 176). That is, teachers need to make choices regarding curriculum design in every lesson (Nation & Macalister, 2010). Of course, the authors do not propose that teachers necessarily have to become the agents that should produce materials for their own classes, but that they should both practice doing so every now and then to remain critical and autonomous, and apart from that, have a transformative approach to the received materials and curriculum. In other words, "As teachers use materials they [should] adapt and transform them to suit the needs of particular groups of learners and their own teaching styles"

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION

(Richards, 2001). These processes of transformation are at the heart of teaching and enable good teachers to create effective lessons out of the resources they make use of. Nonetheless, there is certainly difference between novice and experienced teachers in terms of teaching knowledge, awareness and skills. However, as Richards (2001) contends such prerequisites for teaching can be obtained by passing an initial training course such as TESOL, CELTA or other developing opportunities such as observation of experienced teachers, observation of training videos, working under the supervision of experienced teachers and so on.

In a broader and a more professional approach to curriculum development, Handler (2010) states contemporary teacher education programs ought to be adapted to acquaint preservice teachers with essential knowledge of curriculum theory and "critical pedagogy such that these teachers may understand curriculum at the deeper level necessary to make decisions beyond the classroom level" (p. 38).

V. Discussion

To sum up, the discussions above can provide a convincing argument to believe that teachers can play a vital role in the success of a curriculum. In support of this idea, Widdowson (1990) states "what learners do is not directly determined by the syllabus but is a consequence of how the syllabus is methodologically mediated by the teacher in the pursuit of his own course of instruction" (p. 129). In this view, Widdowson (1990) concludes that changes in syllabus will have little effect on learning. For instance, he argues that a notional/functional syllabus is "of itself no more communicative than is a structural one" (p. 129). Therefore, it is because of the importance of the teacher's role that, as White (1988) elaborates on the problem-solving model of innovation proposed by Havelock (1971 as cited in White, 1988), all teachers should accept some responsibility for researching their classroom work as an important part of teacher's professionalism. According to White (1988) a problem solving approach is based on action research, the aim of which is to draw on research in adapting and enhancing curriculum practice, consequently having a "direct relationship to innovation and reform" (p. 123).White continues that the focus of action research, which is a manifestation of the goals of problem solving approach, is on spotting the problems by "teachers themselves rather than on those defined by an outside consultant or change agent" (p. 124). Therefore, the authors propose action research is an integral part of a transformative approach to curriculum development requiring teachers to actively participate in the processes of creation and transformation.

Finally, by a transformative approach to curriculum development the authors argue not for teachers to necessarily participate in curriculum development, but for their mentality to be exercised so that they can become autonomous and critical as transformative intellectuals, and therefore train critical and independent learners. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) maintains teacher autonomy can be seen at the heart of postmethod pedagogy. Autonomous teachers "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 (p. 178). In other words, "no curriculum development without teacher development" (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 68) is practical. Therefore, the authors argue teacher education is a prerequisite for a transformative approach to curriculum development. In other words, only postmethod teachers, who have formed an understanding of action research and the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility can lead the path of postmethod pedagogy. In addition, the authors maintain postmethod teachers should take a transformative approach to curriculum development. That is, they should actively participate in curriculum development when they are invited by the curriculum to act so, and adapt or transform the curriculum when they are constrained by it. This means since contexts, cultures and possibilities differ from class to class, teachers should never be enslaved by curricula but manage, adjust or transform them accordingly.

VI. Conclusion

Based on the arguments presented in this article, and from a post-method perspective, the authors can conclude that questions such as 'What is the best method?' 'What is the best syllabus design?', or 'Who is the best teacher?' are enlightening only on the surface, however, in deeper layers of such questions lie the ideologies of a conformist educational system which seeks to hinder critical thinking, and sacrifice individualization for the sake of its own political and industrial interests. Nonetheless, as Trim (1976 as cited in McDonough and Shaw, 2003), one of the advisors for the Council of Europe, has shown it is possible to pursue individualization even within a hugely authoritarian framework. What is more, "individualization does not necessarily mean that the students will be working on their own. In some cases, individualization can take place in small groups or pairs where students work on a similar task. At other times the learner may work with a teacher or in a solitary mode" (McDonough, Shaw & Masuhara, 2013, p. 251).

This is, however, possible only when teachers become transformative intellectuals who foster border crossing, respect individualized needs, learning styles and strategies; teachers who promote critical thinking and learner autonomy. In short, teachers who follow the lines of postmethod pedagogy, and as Giroux (1988) states lead students to the readiness of becoming change agents who can reform both the educational system and the society. Giroux's (1988) idea of transformative intellectuals is in line with the parameters of a postmethod pedagogy (particularity, practicality and possibility) described by Kumaravadivelu (2001), since it provides the participants with the opportunity to draw on

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION

their cultural and social knowledge and dynamically interact with the materials they are presented with, and even make alterations to the content based on their understanding and the particular situations they live in. Accordingly, as Kelly (2004) concludes, a curriculum is appropriate to the extent that it allows teachers to foster individualization through their own judgment as professionals.

REFERENCES

[1] Aronowitz, S. & H. A. Giroux. (1991). Postmodern education: Politics, culture, and social criticism. London: Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

[2] Dewey, J. (1916). Democracy and education. New York: Macmillan

[3] Elliott, J. (1991). Action research for educational change. Buckingham, England: Open University Press.

[4] Elliott, J. (1994). The teacher's role in curriculum development: An unresolved issue in English attempts at curriculum reform, *Curriculum Studies* 2.1, 43-69. DOI: 10.1080/0965975940020103.

[5] Freeman, D. (1996) Redefining research and what teachers know. In K. Bailey & D. Nunan (eds.), *Voices from the language classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 88-115.

[6] Giroux, H. A. (1988). Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

[7] Giroux, H. A. (2005). Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education (2nd edn.). London: Routledge.

[8] Giroux, H. A. (2009). Democracy's nemesis: The rise of the corporate university. *Cultural studies* 10.10, 1-27. DOI: 10.1177/1532708609341169.

[9] Handler, B. (2010). Teacher as curriculum leader: A consideration of the appropriateness of that role assignment to classroom-based practitioners. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership* 3.3, 32-42.

[10] Kelly, A. V. (2004). The curriculum: Theory and practice (5th edn.). London: Sage Publications Limited.

[11] Kiely, R. & P. Rea-Dickins (2005). Program evaluation in language education. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

[12] Kumaravadivelu, B. (1994). The post-method condition: Emerging strategies for second/foreign language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly* 28.1, 27–48. DOI: 10.2307/3587197.

[13] Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly* 35.4, 537-560. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588427/ (accessed 2/6/215).

[14] Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Beyond methods: Macrostrategies for language teaching. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[15] Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Association.

[16] Larsen-Freeman, D. (1990). On the need for a theory of language teaching, in J. E. Alatis (ed.), *Georgetown university round table on languages and linguistics*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 261-70.

[17] McDonough, J. & C. Shaw. (2003). Materials and methods in ELT: A teacher's guide (2nd ed.). Victoria: Blackwell Publishing.

[18] McDonough, J., C. Shaw & H. Masuhara. (2013). Materials and methods in ELT: A teacher's guide (3rd ed.). Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.

[19] Nation, I. S. P. & J. Macalister. (2010). Language curriculum design. New York: Routledge.

[20] Omaggio, A. C. (1986). Teaching language in context. Boston: Heinle &Heinle Publishers.

[21] Pennycook, A. (1989). The concept of method, interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly* 23.4, 589-618. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3587534/ (accessed 8/7/2015).

[22] Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method—why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24.2, 161–76. DOI: 10.2307/3586897.

[23] Richards, J. (2001). Curriculum development in language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[24] Richards, J. C. (2006). Materials development and research—Making the connection. *RELC Journal*, 37.5, 5-26. DOI: 10.1177/0033688206063470.

[25] Richards, J. C. (2013). Curriculum approaches in language teaching: Forward, central, and backward design. *RELC Journal,* 44.1, 5-33. DOI: 10.1177/0033688212473293.

[26] Stenhouse, L. (1975). An introduction to curriculum research and development. London: Heinemann.

[27] Zeichner, K. M. (1983). Alternative paradigms on teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 34.3, 3-9. DOI: 10.1177/002248718303400302.

[28] Widdowson, H. G. (1990). Aspects of language teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[29] White, R. V. (1988). The ELT curriculum: Design, innovation and management. Oxford: Blackwell Basil.

[30] Wolin, S. (1969). Political theory as a vocation. *The American Political Science Review,* 63.4, 1062-1082. DOI: 10.2307/1955072.

Arash V. Naeini is a PhD candidate of TEFL at Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran. He is an instructor at Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran. He has also taught simultaneous and consecutive interpretation at Alborz College News.

He gained his CELTA qualification in Oxford in 2010.

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION

Nima Shakouri is a faculty member at Islamic Azad University. Moreover, he has published nationally and internationally.

© 2016 ACADEMY PUBLICATION