

Re-invention in ELT Pedagogy: the ‘Goldilocks’ Principle

Alan Waters
Lancaster University, UK
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Abstract

The ELT professional discourse has increasingly come to favour a ‘communicating to learn’(CTL) approach to pedagogy, consisting of an amalgam of elements such as ‘focus on form’, ‘learner autonomy’, ‘naturalistic’ use of language, and so on. Methods derived from this approach include, e.g., ‘Dogmé ELT’, ‘task-based learning’, and ‘CLIL’. However, unfortunately, as numerous reports indicate, the use of wholesale forms of CTL-based pedagogy are impracticable in the majority of ELT situations. This is because ELT occurs mostly at the basic education level in ‘TESEP’-oriented institutions located in an ‘EFL’ setting, a type of context which differs in a number of important respects from that assumed by the CTL construct. However, rather than therefore ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’, this article proposes that a ‘re-invention’ innovation strategy should be used, whereby more compatible, ‘blended’ forms of pedagogy are developed, combining together elements of existing ‘grass-roots’ practice with those that make up the CTL model. How this might be achieved is illustrated with reference to representative examples of the issue, viz., task-based learning, the promotion of learner autonomy, and the use of ‘naturalistic’ classroom communication.

Keywords: ELT pedagogy, re-invention, task-based learning, autonomy, classroom interaction

In recent years something of a consensus has arisen within influential parts of the ELT professional discourse concerning the optimal form that ELT pedagogy should take (see, e.g., Scheffler 2012). In a nutshell, as Waters (2012: 443) explains, this methodological ‘model’ can be characterised as a recrudescence of the ‘naturalistic’, language use-based ‘learning-by-doing’ approach previously associated with the ‘strong’ form of Communicative Language Teaching (Howatt 1984: 279) – what might be referred to as a ‘communicating to learn’ (CTL) approach. Among its main features are a focus on:

maximizing opportunities for learners to interact as autonomously as possible with ‘authentic’ communication data in order to produce personally meaningful utterances... allied with a proportionally much smaller component involving a ‘focus on form’ (i.e. an ‘emergent’, ‘just in time’) and/or ‘awareness-raising’ treatment of grammar and so on (Waters: op. cit.).

Teaching methods that can be associated with a CTL approach include, e.g., ‘Dogmé ELT’ (Meddings & Thornbury 2009), ‘Content and Language Integrated Learning’ (Dalton-Puffer 2007), ‘text-based’ materials design (Tomlinson 2010), and, in particular, ‘Task-based Learning’ (Willis & Willis 2007).

ELT practitioners are nowadays under increasing pressure to adopt at least some if not all of the elements of CTL pedagogy (see, e.g., Littlewood 2004; Prodromou & Mishan 2008; Scheffler *ibid.*; Waters 2015). However, it is argued in what follows that, in fact, for this ‘model’ to be of widespread relevance, it is essential for its features to undergo suitable forms of adaptation or, in other words, what (Rogers 2003: 180-188) refers to as ‘re-invention’. Rogers defines ‘re-invention’ as occurring when an innovation is ‘changed or modified by a user in the process of its adoption and implementation’ (*ibid.*: 180). As he also explains, there is evidence that ‘a higher degree of re-invention leads to a faster rate of adoption ... [and] a higher degree of sustainability of an innovation’ (183). The need for re-invention arises because of a number of incompatibilities between the teaching ideas associated with CTL, on the one hand, and, on the other, the conditions prevailing in the overwhelming majority of ELT situations. In the remainder of this paper the attempt is therefore made to show how forms of ‘re-invention’ appropriate to the world of ELT at large can be achieved with reference to a number of the main aspects of the CTL approach.

Mapping the landscape of ELT

Firstly, however, in order to provide a frame of reference for what follows, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by what has just been referred to as ‘the overwhelming majority of ELT situations’. There is, of course, an obvious sense in which each ELT setting is unique. But, equally, it is also possible to identify a number of overall characteristics which most of the world’s ELT settings, to a greater or lesser extent, can be seen to share. Thus, the British Council (Smith & Knagg 2012) estimates that, of the more than a billion English language learners around the world, approximately 85% are studying at the ‘basic’ education level (i.e., in primary and secondary schools). Given the educational level at which the teaching of is taking place, it can also be assumed that the language level of most of the learners is likely to range from ‘beginner’ to ‘intermediate’ (‘A1’ to ‘B1/B2’, in CEF terms).

Furthermore, it seems safe to also assume that most such schooling will occur in locations where English is not the native language of the majority of the population.

In addition, the chief characteristics of the kind of institutional setting in which such learners learn will tend to be 'TESEP' in nature (Holliday 1994a & b), i.e., conforming to those typical of state-sector education system provision. As a result, it can be expected that, inter alia, class sizes will be relatively large; learners are likely to share a lingua franca other than English; the teaching of English will tend to take its lead from the approach employed for other school subjects, rather than professional trends within ELT; reasons for learning will be largely 'institutional' vs. 'instrumental', i.e., in order to equip learners with a foundation of the kind of knowledge seen as necessary for educating young persons, rather than for immediate, practical application (however much 'lip service' may be paid to the latter in curriculum documents); the professional 'culture' of teachers will be primarily 'collectionist' (e.g., content-based) and to much lesser extent 'integrationist' (e.g., process-oriented); and so on (Holliday *ibid.*). In addition, teaching will tend to be organised on a 'drip-feed' basis, i.e., occurring for a few hours a week over a number of terms or semesters spanning several years, punctuated by regular and sometimes relatively lengthy holiday periods, rather than on a more intensive basis.

Furthermore, following Clark 1987 (cf. Cortazzi & Jin 1996; LoCastro 1996), the dominant educational value system influencing teaching and learning in such institutions will lean towards the 'classical humanist' and/or 'reconstructionist' paradigms (i.e., focusing on intellectual understanding of a set body of knowledge and/or skills-based, objectives-oriented 'training'), rather than the 'progressivist' school of thought (characterised by a focus on 'process', whole person development, learning how to learn/by doing, and so on). It is also important to note that, partly as a corollary, the learners in question will be subject to a series of regular, summative progress tests of an increasingly 'high-stakes' nature, most of which, for logistical and other reasons, are likely to focus primarily on language system knowledge (grammar, lexis, and so on).

It is such a macro-level conceptualisation of the way the majority of the ELT world is configured which informs the analysis that follows. In other words, how well-suited to the needs of such learners and the overall characteristics of the situations in which they learn, are the kinds of 'communicating to learn'-based pedagogical proposals outlined earlier?

1. Task-based learning

As already noted, one major practical application of the pedagogical model in question has taken the form of 'task-based learning' (TBL) (here regarded as being an approach to language teaching in which learners solve communication problems in order to learn English – see, e.g., Ellis 2003). However, firstly, the inductive, process-oriented pedagogical 'style' of TBL is likely to be perceived as incompatible with the more 'expository', content-focused teaching approach that, as has been pointed out in the previous section, prevails in the majority of English language learning situations. As Ellis 2009 acknowledges:

Educational systems in many parts of the world place the emphasis on knowledge-learning rather than skill development, and a task-based approach to language teaching is not readily compatible with such a philosophy. A structural approach based on teaching discrete items of language accords more closely with such an educational philosophy (242).

In addition, the psycho-biological development of most learners beyond the early stages of primary school tends to result in an increased capacity and preference for a relatively explicit, conscious, 'didactic' approach to learning and teaching (DeKeyser 2003). However, as a learning-by-doing-based approach, TBL relies on an underlying method of learning much more similar to the largely implicit, informal and 'incidental' processes associated with L1 acquisition in early childhood. It can therefore be regarded as potentially inappropriate to the needs of the audience in question in this way as well, i.e., in terms of the kind of overall teaching-learning methodology involved.

Also, in Carless 2002 & 2007 - two in a series of his studies of attempts to implement TBL in the Hong Kong basic education system (and still among the very few examples of research of this kind) - a number of important pedagogical problems are reported. For example, at the primary school level, there were frequent concerns about the levels of noise and indiscipline involved, the extent of use of the mother tongue, variations in levels of learner involvement, and 'drawing and colouring', i.e., the amount of task-work not directly related to L2 language development (Carless 2002). At the secondary level, in addition to most of the problems already mentioned, there were also concerns about the process-oriented nature of the work making it harder for learners to develop a sense of achievement, the lack of 'grammatical input', incompatibility with examinations, and over-emphasis on oral work (Carless 2007).

Furthermore, in his comprehensive survey of research into TBL, Swan 2005 concludes that:

The claim that TBI [i.e., TBL] is a superior teaching approach, solidly based on the findings of current theory and research, cannot be sustained... The naturalistic communication-driven pedagogy characteristic of TBI has serious limitations, especially as regards the systematic teaching of new linguistic material. Its exclusive use is particularly unsuitable for exposure-poor contexts where time is limited... (396-7: my interpolation).

As already indicated, given that the level of knowledge of most of the world's English language learners is such that their acquisition of 'new linguistic material' is likely to be a major learning priority, and their learning situation usually one which is 'exposure-poor ... [and] where time is limited', it is hard to see how there can be disagreement with the view that the 'exclusive' use of TBL, at any rate, as Swan goes on to say, is inappropriate 'for most of the world's language learners' (ibid.).

However, at the same time, despite these limitations, it is also important to consider the potential for re-invention of TBL in the kind of English language learning situation in question. As one of the teachers in Carless 2007 puts it, "We need to find some other method, not a task-based one and not a traditional one, something between the two" (600). A case can be made for the inclusion of a TBL-based element in pedagogy in such a setting as a *complement to* (rather than a replacement of) the relatively 'expository' approach that tends to prevail within it. Classroom-based research shows that learning how to make practical, 'communicative' use of a foreign language works best when both an 'explicit' knowledge of language elements is involved *and* also the ability to draw on them holistically on an 'on-line' basis (Lightbown & Spada 2006: 179-180). There is therefore a *prime facie* pedagogical case for attempting to focus on and integrate both of these aspects of language learning.

One ‘framework’ for this purpose which has been extensively applied to the design of learning units in a range of popular ELT coursebooks (e.g., Hutchinson 2009) is the ‘Materials Design Model’ to be found in Hutchinson & Waters 1987: Ch. 10 (cf. Estaire & Zanon 1994; Ellis 2003: 28-30). Here, the main information content and linguistic forms in an initial ‘input’ text are first of all focused on in a series of exercises. These elements are then put into practice in a holistic way by work involving a closely-linked communicative problem-solving task, resulting in the production by the learners of a ‘text’ of their own parallel to the kind in the ‘input’. In this way an integrated underlying pedagogical structure is created, one which is both ‘focus on forms’ and meaning-oriented, and which also encapsulates both ‘expository’ and more ‘implicit’ forms of language learning, via the linked ‘exercises’ and ‘task’ elements, respectively.

It should be noted that, although such a framework resembles what is sometimes referred to as ‘task-supported learning’ (Ellis 2003: 28-30), it is more accurately characterised as a ‘task-enhanced’ approach (Tom Hutchinson, personal communication), since the former term implies that it is the task which is the primary element, whereas in fact, in the model just described, it is only one of several, equally or more important elements. In this way the potential for compatibility between the re-invention and the dominant type of ELT situation is maximised, since, as innovation theory indicates (see, e.g., Waters 2009), ‘tradition guides the transition’ (Mensch 1979), i.e., only incremental change is likely to be successful.

2. Learner autonomy

A second main strand of thinking in the ‘CTL’ pedagogical model outlined earlier is the view that learners will learn best when they are able to do so as autonomously as possible (see, e.g., Benson & Voller 1997), and therefore that one of the primary roles of the teacher is to facilitate ‘learning how to learn’ on the part of learners, in order to maximise their ability to learn independently.

Of course, in the final analysis, it is the learner who must do the learning, both in the classroom and beyond it, and pedagogy must therefore be centrally concerned with attempting to effect such an outcome. However, in attempting to do so, the psychology of the learners and the realities of the learning context obviously also have to be taken into account.

Firstly, the typical motivation of the kind of learners under focus here (i.e., those referred to in the ‘Mapping the Landscape’ section above) is important to identify. Learners with a strong motivation to learn English are likely to be more willing to learn independently than those whose motivation is lower (Spratt, Humphreys, & Chan 2002). Levels of motivation will obviously vary among any population of learners. However, since the kind of learners in question *have to* study English (i.e., as a school requirement), rather than because they necessarily want to, and because they are at an age where most are unlikely to have an immediate practical use for the language outside the classroom, it seems safe to assume that their motivation will be primarily ‘extrinsic’ rather than ‘intrinsic’ (cf. Sakui & Cowie 2012). It follows that their motivation to learn is likely to rely on an external rather than internal ‘locus of

control', making it relatively more difficult to foster in them a desire to learn independently (cf. Csizér & Kormos 2009).

But even where the motivation to learn is more positive, it does not follow that it will readily become self-sustaining. As Ryan and Deci 2000 say:

despite the fact that humans are liberally endowed with intrinsic motivational tendencies, the evidence is now clear that *the maintenance and enhancement of this inherent propensity requires supportive conditions, as it can be fairly readily disrupted by various nonsupportive conditions* (70, my emphasis).

As they go on to also argue, after infancy, intrinsic motivation is not typical of most human behaviour:

Although intrinsic motivation is an important type of motivation... much of what people do is not, strictly speaking, intrinsically motivated, especially after early childhood when the freedom to be intrinsically motivated is increasingly curtailed by social pressures to do activities that are not interesting and to assume a variety of new responsibilities... (71).

In addition, Ryan and Deci also criticise the intrinsic vs. extrinsic distinction that typifies much of literature on motivation as too simplistic, because it assumes i) that intrinsic motivation is inevitably superior, ii) that the distinction between the two concepts is clear-cut, and iii) that extrinsic motivation is monolithic in nature (ibid: 72-74).

Instead, they therefore propose that extrinsic motivation is best seen as comprising a cline of types, varying in the degree of autonomy involved, and ranging from 'External regulation' (akin to the stereotypical view of extrinsic motivation, whereby behaviour is based primarily on external rewards, punishments, and so on), on the one hand, to 'Integrated regulation' on the other. As they explain:

students who do their homework because they personally grasp its value for their chosen career are extrinsically motivated, as are those who do the work only because they are adhering to their parents' control. Both examples involve instrumentalities rather than enjoyment of the work itself, yet the former case of extrinsic motivation entails personal endorsement and a feeling of choice, whereas the latter involves compliance with an external regulation (ibid: 71).

and

Integration occurs when identified regulations are fully assimilated to the self, which means they have been evaluated and brought into congruence with one's other values and needs. Actions characterized by integrated motivation share many qualities with intrinsic motivation, although they are still considered extrinsic because they are done to attain separable outcomes rather than for their inherent enjoyment (ibid: 73).

Such a conceptualisation of motivation seems in close keeping with the realities of post-infancy, basic education-level learning. It implies that i) very few learners are likely to ever be purely intrinsically motivated, i.e., out of their interest in the English language alone; ii) rather than doing so autonomously, most will therefore need their motivation for learning to be sustained by some form of 'external regulation' congruent with their perceptions of their needs; and iii) a motivational 'regime' of

this kind can nevertheless be seen as resembling, in certain important respects, the characteristics of more fully autonomous, intrinsically-motivated behaviour.

From this perspective, the main pedagogical issue becomes one not of how learners might be helped to become fully autonomous in their learning, but rather, how teaching and learning might move as far as possible towards the ‘integrated regulation’ part of the extrinsic motivation spectrum – in other words, how the prevailing pedagogical apparatus of textbooks, tests, teaching and so on might be used so as to help to build up a sense of ‘congruence’ with learners’ own perceptions of their learning needs (cf. Littlewood 1999; Dörnyei 2001: 18-23).

A related line of argumentation can be derived from consideration of a number of the other salient characteristics of the prototypical English language learning situation. For example, in Waters (1998) a range of day-to-day ‘external pressures’ at play in the ‘majority’ EFL teaching context are identified, all of which significantly counteract teachers’ ability to foster learner autonomy, such as the following:

- shortage of time: getting learners to do more of the work for themselves takes too long;
- examination pressures: results often appear to be better when the approach is more teacher-centred;
- materials constraints: the methodology of the textbook forces the teacher to adopt a teacher-centred approach;
- the head of department/headmaster/inspector threat: the ‘powers-that-be’ will not tolerate a more learner-centred style;
- cultural expectations: the socio-cultural norm is for teachers to transmit knowledge and learners to passively absorb it;
- learner resistance: learners, for all sorts of reasons, may be reluctant to take responsibility for managing their own learning (13).

He also mentions several ‘internal drives’ (i.e., teacher-specific factors) that can also have a similar effect, such as:

- lack of training in how to manage classroom learning in a ‘delegated’ manner (cf. Griffiths 2012);
- wanting to ‘micro-manage’ student learning, in order to reduce the risk of mistakes, unpredictable turns of events, and so on;
- a desire to make oneself useful to or ‘needed’ by learners by providing them with more support than is optimal;
- being an enthusiastic learner/user of English oneself and therefore not appreciating sufficiently the level of motivation and willingness to engage in learning English of most learners (Waters 1998: 14-15).

In short, because of the importance of such factors, the fostering of learner autonomy in the prototypical English language learning situation will nearly always be fraught with difficulty. This is not to say that it cannot be undertaken, but, rather, that it will only be possible to the extent that due account is taken of situational variables of the kind just mentioned. As Illés (2012: 508) puts it:

Education cannot function without teacher control. How teachers exercise this control and how much they deem appropriate to relinquish should be their decision, based on the knowledge of their teaching context and their students in particular. Any model of learner

autonomy should therefore be adopted only after careful appraisal of its relevance to a specific educational setting.

To sum up, both main parts of the picture just outlined indicate that approaches to fostering learner autonomy in the majority of English language learning situations around the world need to take into account the particular natures of i) the psychology of the prototypical learner and ii), the typical contextual realities. Both sets of factors indicate the need for a re-invented, ‘hybrid’ form of pedagogy in this area, similar in nature to the ‘blended’ approach outlined in the previous section in connection with the use of TBL. In other words, the ‘bedrock’ of accustomed practice needs to be retained, but also built on, so that its potential for fostering an appropriate degree of learner autonomy is maximised.

Examples of pedagogical ideas which match these criteria include Sturtridge 1982, Allwright 1988, Clarke 1989, Stevick 1996: Ch. 8, Littlewood 1997, Waters 1998, Spratt et al. 2002 and Illés 2012. All of them are characterised by taking the norms of pedagogical practice that prevail in the prototypical English language learning situation as a ‘given’, and then identifying the potential for building incrementally on this foundation so that an appropriate element of work aimed at fostering learner autonomy is also introduced.

For example, in Clarke (op. cit.), one of the ‘stock in trade’ features of pedagogy in the type of language learning situation in question - the grammar structure substitution table – is introduced and worked with first of all in a conventional, teacher-directed way. Following this, however, the learners go on to i) create a parallel table of their own, ii) then complete a ‘gapped’ version of a similar table, and iii) finally, construct a new, parallel table of their own and try it out on their fellow learners (cf. Stevick 1996: Ch. 8). In such ways, rather than a more idealised approach to learner autonomy (Smith 2008; cf. Littlewood 1999), a more ‘grounded’ (but also theoretically well-motivated) way of fostering it can be developed, one which –for the reasons that have been put forward - is likely to be better suited to the needs of the majority of English language learners and the realities of their learning situations. Once again, a ‘re-invention’ innovation strategy has been adopted, whereby widespread existing pedagogical has been both simultaneously retained and redeveloped.

3. Classroom interaction

As already indicated, a further main pedagogical principle of the teaching ‘model’ outlined at the outset of this paper is that what happens in the classroom should, as far as possible, involve ‘naturalistic’ rather than ‘artificial’ forms of communication. Thus, for example, when checking learners’ comprehension, Thornbury 2004 recommends asking the question “‘Do you understand?’”, on the grounds that this

is the most direct and honest way we check understanding in real life, so — if the same conditions of authenticity and sincerity are operating in the classroom (which I argue they should be) — then it may make a lot of sense if, when in doubt, teachers simply stop and ask, hand on heart, “Do you understand?”

However, we need to ask to what extent ‘naturalistic’ uses of language which typify communication outside the classroom can in fact also function equally effectively in

pedagogic terms inside it. As, e.g., Prabhu (1992) and Seedhouse (1996) show, the classroom constitutes a well-defined social setting in its own right, with its own accustomed purposes and roles and related routines and rituals, resulting in its own distinctive type of discourse. As Goffman (1981: 53-54) puts it (cf. Ellis 2003: 251-253; Cullen 2002; Sinclair & Coulthard 1975), the ‘social setting of talk... can penetrate into and determine the very structure of the interaction’. As he also goes on to say:

in classroom talk between teacher and students it can be understood that the teacher’s purpose is to uncover what each and every pupil has learned about a given matter and to correct and amplify from that base. The consequence of this educational, not conversational, imperative is that classroom interaction can come to be parcelled out into three-move interchanges:

Teacher: Query

Pupil: Answer

Teacher: Evaluative comment of answer...;

furthermore, it is understood that the teacher’s concern is to check up on and extend what pupils know, not add to her knowledge, and that it would not be proper for a pupil to try to reverse these roles (op. cit.).

In other words, in classroom settings, because of the operation of the ‘educational... imperative’, i) particular norms of interaction are expected, and ii) these norms will differ from those that obtain in non-classroom settings. In terms of pedagogy, thus, the effects of this principle cannot be ignored. Rather than ‘naturalistic’, the kind of discourse which is most ‘natural’ in classroom terms is likely to be rather different from the discourse of other kinds of settings. Furthermore, to be truly learner-centred, it is obviously important to take into account learners’ likely expectations of this kind about how classroom discourse will be structured (Ellis 2003: 251-253)¹.

However, how, in that case, it might be immediately objected, can the advocacy of the importance of ‘naturalistic’ communication for language learning pedagogy be squared with the rigid, hierarchical ‘Initiation-Response-Feedback’ (IRF) type of teaching-learning sequences that classrooms, by their nature (cf., e.g., Sinclair & Coulthard 1975), as Goffman shows, tend towards? In attempting an answer, it is first of all important to distinguish between ‘structure’ of the kind associated with IRF exchanges, on the one hand, and ‘control’ of the kind that inhibits learning processes, on the other. It often appears to be assumed that the greater the degree of pedagogical ‘structure’, the stronger the amount of control, and therefore the more limited the scope for learning (see, e.g., Nunan 1999: 75). However, of course, there is in fact no necessary correlation of this kind between the two concepts (Owen, Froman, & Moscow 1981: 388). Pedagogy that is relatively ‘structured’ can still allow for large amounts of student initiative and independence within its interstices (Stevick 1982: 7-8; O’Neill 1991; Wong-Fillmore 1985). This occurs because of the variable ways in which all three main elements in the IRF sequence can be calibrated. In some cases, the exchange may leave open very little room for learner initiative, as in, for example, a ‘mechanical’ drill. But equally, on other occasions, the same overall structure may act as a ‘frame’ for much more open-ended and creative learner responses, as in, e.g., project-work. The overall pedagogical framework is the same, but the kinds of learning being fostered are very different.

¹ See O’Neill (1991) for a telling example of an actual lesson in which this principle is ignored, resulting in what he characterises as ‘learner neglect’.

The crucial issue is therefore one of attempting to create, within the constraints of the classroom as a social setting, the level of structure which is optimal for learning. Too much structure in relation to the learning point in hand will clearly leave too little space for learning processes to operate fruitfully. But equally, in other cases, too little structure is also likely to have a similar, negative effect on the creation and uptake of learning opportunities (Hutchinson & Hutchinson 1996). This occurs because 'if they [the learners] are seldom sure what kind of activity is coming next, they will have to divert a large part of their energy to figuring out what to do and when to try to do it' (Stevick 1982: 7), energy that as a result cannot be used for the primary learning task. In other words, the degree of structure in classroom discourse which is likely to be most effective will depend on to what extent it is seen to meet learners' learning needs at any given moment in the learning process. As such, it is will vary dynamically, rather than be monolithic in nature.

In the prototypical classroom English language learning situation, thus, learners' learning needs can best be met less by the adoption of a wholesale 'naturalistic' form of interaction but, rather, by a 'Goldilocks' level of pedagogical structuring, i.e., neither too much nor too little, the exact degree varying, of course, according to the nature of the learning needs to hand. By a re-invention of this kind it is possible to go some way towards reconciling the pressures of the 'educational imperative' that operates in formal learning situations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the preference for more 'naturalistic' forms of classroom interaction favoured by the currently dominant conceptual model of teaching.

Practical examples of the elements of such a pedagogy can be found in, e.g., Littlewood 1992: Chs. 6 & 7, the 'Communication Games' series of teaching activities books (e.g., Hadfield 1995) and in the overall design features of coursebooks such as Hutchinson 2008. In the latter, a series of unit sections are first of all studied, each involving communication and language work which gradually proceeds from 'input' to learner 'output'. Each also moves from initially eliciting relatively 'closed' responses from the learners to ending with ones that are a good deal more 'open-ended'. Also, work done in earlier sections is often recycled and built on further in later ones, meaning that there is also progression in the kind of student response elicited in this respect as well. Then, once all the sections have been completed, students build further and in an integrated way on that part of the work as a whole by undertaking a related language learning project, in which they are given extensive opportunities to develop further complex, personalised responses to what has been studied. Therefore, in this way, in overall terms, work which begins in a relatively tightly-structured manner gradually unfolds to provide the basis for the kinds of responses by learners that approximate closely to those that might occur in communication outside the classroom. In such ways, in other words, while the innate 'didactic' character of most classroom discourse must be taken into account, it is nevertheless possible within its confines to also create the conditions for forms of discourse more akin to those preferred by the pedagogical model in focus. Once again, also, it should be noted, the innovation strategy used has been one of re-invention rather than 'revolution'.

Conclusion

A view of what might constitute the optimal form of language teaching pedagogy has become increasingly influential in important parts of the ELT professional discourse in recent years. However, in order for the fruits of this thinking to be of benefit to most of the ELT world, the needs of the prototypical English language learner and the characteristics of the related learning situation also need to be taken into account. In other words, in order to avoid the pitfalls of an ‘applied science’ (Wallace 1991) or ‘linguistics applied’ (Widdowson 2000) approach in attempting to relate conceptual models to practice, ‘bottom-up’ pedagogical perspectives must be given the same or greater weight as ‘top-down’ ones. All forms of successful innovation depend on satisfactorily linking together new understandings with those which are already familiar (Wedell 2009). In any attempt to innovate in pedagogy, thus, new ideas must be satisfactorily ‘keyed’ into the foundation of existing pedagogical practice. In other words, appropriate forms of ‘re-invention’ need to take place.

This paper therefore attempted to construct a picture of the prototypical English language learner and learning situation as the starting point for an evaluation of the likely relevance to the ELT ‘world’ of the model of pedagogy which currently tends to prevail in the ELT professional discourse. The analysis indicated that much of this kind of pedagogy, in its ‘strong’ form, is unfortunately incompatible with the learning needs of the prototypical English language learner and the learning context.

However, the attempt has also been made to show how ‘re-invented’ forms of pedagogy can be developed, which, while cognisant with the currently dominant theoretical pedagogical model, simultaneously attempt to take into account the prevailing realities of the majority of ELT settings. In particular, an outline has been provided of how, in this way, a focus on task-based learning, learner autonomy and ‘naturalistic’ discourse can be successfully blended with the everyday pedagogical repertoires of the kind prevailing in most English language learning situations.

At the same time it should be emphasised that there is no intention here to propose a replacement of one model of pedagogy with another. Rather, what has been provided is a sketch the general features of and principles involved in what is believed likely to be a more successful, re-invention-based method for attempting innovation in this area, one which can be further adapted in a fine-grained manner to suit the ways in which, of course, despite the features they have in common, the details of individual English language learning situations inevitably also vary from one instantiation to another. It is hoped that in this way – by valuing equally both existing, widespread forms of pedagogy as well as the potential in academic research and theorising about pedagogical alternatives, and considering how the two might be optimally integrated – that this paper has helped to show how academic and practitioner perspectives on ELT pedagogy can be productively mediated.

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