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ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines and describes eight Essentials of Second Language Education that fit with the CLT paradigm shift. It focuses on one of the eight essentials and the concludes. These eight essentials are: encourage Learner Autonomy, emphasize the Social Nature of Learning, develop Curricular Integration, Focus on Meaning, celebrate Diversity, expand Thinking Skills, utilize Alternative Assessment methods, and promote English language Teachers as Co-learners.

KEYWORDS

CLT, Encourage Learner Autonomy, Emphasize Social Nature of Learning, Develop Curricular Integration, Focus on Meaning, Celebrate Diversity, Expand Thinking Skills, Utilize Alternative Assessment Methods;

INTRODUCTION

One of the most widely used teaching approaches for second languages around the world since the 1970s is communicative language instruction. Prior to that, the more conventional teaching strategies that were used placed a greater emphasis on developing accurate, grammatically sound target language.

However, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) started to shift the focus so that mistakes are considered as a necessary element of language development and learners generate the language with an emphasis on fluency. In the past, teachers were viewed as the only ones with the authority to run the class and impart knowledge. In this method, English language instructors share power and "facilitate" learning rather than impart information. As a result, CLT is seen as a significant change and one of the primary methods of teaching second languages in use today. [1]

This significant transformation in second language teaching and learning is referred to as a paradigm shift by Jacobs and Farrell, as we must change the way we view teachers, students, second language learning,

and teaching in order to successfully use the CLT approach.

Although the CLT paradigm shift was started many years ago in second language instruction, we contend that it has only been partially adopted. This incomplete implementation has two causes: first, by attempting to comprehend each essential separately, second language educators have weakened their comprehension by failing to see the bigger picture; and second, by attempting to implement each essential separately, second language educators have made the already difficult task of shift or change even more difficult. Now we provide a brief introduction to CLT and how we should actually comprehend and apply it as a true paradigm shift.

Communicative language teaching - CLT can be seen as a set of "principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the class-room".[3]

CLT has been the "in" approach to second language education since its beginning in the early 1970s, and has now become the driving force that affects the planning, implementation, and evaluation of English Language Teaching (ELT) throughout the world. That said, not many English language teachers or second language educators are in agreement or even clear in their own minds as to what exactly CLT is, and there exist as many diverse interpretations as there are language teachers and second language educators.

This wide variation in implementation of CLT is not, as we discuss in the article on celebrating Diversity, necessarily a bad thing. Rather, it is a natural product of the range of contexts in which second language learning takes place and the range of experiences that

students, teachers, and other stakeholders bring with them. In its early inception CLT was seen as an approach to teaching English as a second or foreign language for the purposes of enabling second language learners to be able to use language functionally, meaningfully and appropriately, instead of the previous emphasis on correctness. [4]

However, over the years ESL and EFL teachers have interpreted a CLT approach to language teaching in many different ways with many thinking that the teacher just forms groups in their classes and let the students practice speaking the second language. The end result that teachers using this approach were seeking was that their students become competent in speaking that second language. Richards (2005) calls this phase 1 of the CLT movement and he says it continued until the late 1960s. In phase 1 the previous traditional approaches that gave priority to grammatical competence as a foundation for language proficiency gave way to functional and skill-based teaching that had a "fluency over accuracy" pedagogical purpose. The next phase of CLT according to Richards was the classic CLT period from the 1970s to the 1990s.

In this phase, the place of grammar in instruction was questioned because it seemed to result only in grammatical competence that produced grammatically correct sentences under controlled conditions but did not, according to many, improve oral production or aid the communicative use of language. So what was really called for at that time was communicative competence where students could actually communicate orally in the second language; for example, Hymes suggested that Chomsky's ideal native speaker with linguistic competence include the sociolinguistic component of communicative competence of knowledge of and ability for language

use with respect to four factors: "possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and accepted usage".

More recently, Richards suggests that communicative competence includes the following aspects of language knowledge:

• knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions;
• knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants;
• knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts;
• knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge;

Since the 1990s CLT has continued to evolve by drawing from different educational paradigms and diverse sources with the result that as Richards maintains, there is still "no single or agreed upon set of practices that characterize current communicative language teaching." Rather, he suggests that communicative language teaching these days refers to "a set of generally agreed upon principles that can be applied in different ways, depending on the teaching context, the age of the learners, their level, their learning goals." In addition, Brown has maintained that CLT should include the following:

• Classroom goals are focused on all the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
• Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
• Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.

• In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts;

Understanding communicative language teaching - In second language education, the CLT paradigm shift over the past 40 years, which long likens to a revolution, flows from the positivism to post positivism shift in science and involves a move away from the tenets of behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics and toward cognitive, and later, socio-cognitive psychology and more contextualized, meaning-based views of language. Key components on this shift concern:

• Focusing greater attention on the role of learners rather than the external stimuli learners are receiving from their environment. Thus, the center of attention shifts from the teacher to the student. This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered or learning centered instruction.
• Focusing greater attention on the learning process rather than on the products that learners produce. This shift is known as a move from product-oriented instruction to process-oriented instruction.
• Focusing greater attention on Diversity among learners and viewing these differences not as impediments to learning but as resources to be recognized, catered to, and appreciated. This shift is known as the study of individual differences.

In research and theory-building, focusing greater attention on the views of those internal to the classroom rather than solely valuing the views of those who come from outside to study classrooms, investigate and evaluate what goes on there, and engage in theorizing about it. This shift is associated

with such innovations as qualitative research, which highlights the subjective and affective, the participants' insider views, and the uniqueness of each context.

Implementing communicative language teaching - The CLT paradigm shift in second language education outlined above has led to many suggested changes in how English as a second/foreign language teaching is conducted and conceived.[5] Our objective in writing this book is to argue that the CLT paradigm shift has not been implemented as widely or as successfully as it might have been because English language educators and other stakeholders have tried to understand and implement the shift in a piecemeal rather than a holistic manner. Thus, we suggest that English as a second/foreign language educators consider eight major changes associated with this shift because of the impact they already have had on the language education field and for the potential impact they could have if they were used in a more integrated fashion.

Learner autonomy - Within a CLT approach to second language education we focus more on the role of learners rather than the external stimuli learners receive from their environment, such as from teachers and materials. In other words, the center of attention in learning English as a second/foreign language has shifted from the teacher and materials (the external) to the student (the internal). This shift is generally known as the move from teacher-centered instruction to learner (or student)-centered instruction. Learner Autonomy is a key concept here: learners have an important share of the responsibility for and control over their own learning.

The social nature of learning - As the name suggests, to be social in learning we mean some form of interaction and cooperation is necessary within a CLT approach to second language education. We focus greater attention on the Social Nature of Learning English as a second/foreign language rather than on students as separate, decontextualized individuals. To understand and promote learning, we look not only at individuals but also at the people who make up their world and the connections between them. These people include not only teachers but also peers and others such as administrators and people in the outside community. Cooperation is valued over competition without excluding the latter completely. When students collaborate they all play leadership roles.

Curricular integration - Curricular Integration refers to a second language pedagogical approach which fuses knowledge from different disciplines to create more meaningful contexts for overall learning. The traditional fragmentation of content by disciplines assumes that students will recognize the links between the disciplines on their own, but this can be difficult for second language students whose main focus may be the language rather than the content.

Focus on meaning - For this essential we focus on learning English as a second/foreign language for purposes other than just passing an exam. Education is not just preparation for life; it is also participation in life. Students understand the purposes of learning and develop their own purposes for learning regardless of the subject. Within learning English as a second/foreign language we suggest that understanding also involves our students' comprehension of what they are learning rather than learning by rote learning methods such as drills so that they can be educated as complete human beings.

Diversity - First of all, we celebrate Diversity among our second language learners and we see this diversity as a plus in our English as a second/foreign language classes. We focus on discerning, taking into account, and appreciating differences among our second

language learners within a CLT approach to language education; thus we consider all second language (indeed all students) to be unique. This uniqueness includes differences not only in first language backgrounds, but also in intelligence profile, personality, and such other background factors as race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sex, and sexual preference. We suggest in this CLT concept that no standard, one-size-fits-all way of teaching a second language exists, and that differences of opinion and perspective offer opportunities for learning rather than being cause for winner-take-all conflict.

Thinking skills - For this CLT essential we focus on how students learn by a process of expanding their Thinking Skills rather than looking only at what they produce. This emphasis on process rather than just on end-product encourages second language students and teachers to promote reflection on one's thinking, to encourage deeper critical thinking, and more varied ways of solving problems, and to gain sense of greater questioning of how things are done. With an appreciation of the complexity, uncertainty, nonlinearity, and instability of knowledge in learning a second language, students not only come to see change as a constant but also that learning a second language (and learning in general) is a life-long process; indeed, we suggest that disruption and surprise are to be welcomed while learning.

Alternative assessment - We should point out immediately that when we say alternative we are not "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" because we still see the place of more traditional testing; it is just that now we want to suggest that English as a second/foreign language teachers and administrators take into account that not all our second language learners may respond to such testing in a manner that compliments their different cultural backgrounds and

that we have alternative means of assessment that may be more suitable. So within a CLT approach to second language education we recognize that while standardized, objective-item tests do provide relevant information, sole reliance on such measures blinds us to a great deal of what is important in education. We suggest that more Alternative Assessments connect closely with real world purposes. Furthermore, this type of assessment is done not mainly by outsiders but more importantly by those actually in the classroom (peers) who grasp the particular context in all its complexity. Thus Alternative Assessment includes students assessing themselves, peers, and the "how" and "what" of their English as a second/foreign language learning. Additionally, Alternative Assessment focuses on what second language students can do rather than on what they cannot do.

Teachers as co-learners - The final concept within the eight essentials for successful implementation of CLT focuses on language teachers not principally as possessors of knowledge that is to be passed on to students; instead, teachers learn along with second language students because knowledge is dynamic and learning is a life-long process. Teachers learn with their students, and they learn along with their fellow teachers. Based on this learning, teachers join students in playing a greater role in such matters as materials design and institutional governance.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have urged our fellow second language educators to take a big picture approach to the changes in our approach to understanding and implementing CLT. We have argued that many of these essential changes stem from a previous underlying paradigm shift toward CLT that continues today. By examining this shift and looking for connections between various changes in our field, these changes

can be better understood. Most importantly, by attempting to implement change in a holistic way, the chances of success greatly increase. This point has been made countless times in works on systems theory by Senge Wheatley, and others. However, it is much easier to state in theory than to implement in practice. Perhaps the best-known and most painful example of the failure to implement holistic change in second language education is that in many cases while teaching methodology has become more communicative, testing remains within the traditional paradigm, consisting of discrete items, lower-order thinking, and a focus on form rather than meaning.

This creates a backwash effect that tends to pull teaching back toward the traditional paradigm, even when teachers and others are striving to go toward the new paradigm. Second language education plays an ever more important role as globalization, for better or worse, marches forward. Perhaps this is where the eighth change we discussed, Teachers as Co-learners, plays the crucial role. Many people are drawn to work in second language education because they enjoy learning languages and want to share this joy with others.

All the changes that have taken place in our field challenge us to continue learning about our profession and to share what we learn with others, including our colleagues, so that we can continue to help our field develop. We hope you enjoy reading the next eight chapters that detail the eight essential and interconnected changes that are necessary for successful English as a second/ foreign language instruction.

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