The Curious Idea of a Christian Teaching Method

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Having enjoyed your company on a couple of previous occasions and apparently made few enough enemies to be invited back, I thought I might pluck up the courage this time to tackle something controversial. Maybe I've just been too bland or you've all been polite beyond the call of duty. Well, if any topic can test your goodwill, perhaps the idea of a Christian teaching method is the one.

The topic is delicate for at least three reasons. First, it is a topic particularly close to the heart of many foreign language specialists. One thing which has traditionally marked us out from our colleagues in other branches of education has been the extent of our preoccupation with methodology. The big modern debates in our profession have by and large been debates about the right methods which should be used to deliver language skills of one kind or another.[1] These debates are sometimes conducted with the kind of fervour commonly reserved for more serious matters like sports results or the merits of particular kinds of music. I have learnt from experience that any suggestion that the methods in which someone has invested their time and energy could be questioned in any way from a Christian point of view can be taken quite personally.

Second, it is a topic which flies in the face of common sense. Everyone knows that methods are

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[1] Christopher Brumfit notes that while discussions of foreign language teaching regularly revolves around the notion of teaching method, "the terms "methods, "teaching method", and methodology are striking by their absence from the general educational literature" (Brumfit, 1991:133).

methods and what really matters is whether they work better than their predecessors. The literature on the relationship of Christian belief to teaching methods is virtually non-existent. All kinds of interesting things have emerged in the papers presented at this conference over the years, and I am as grateful as anyone for the work that has been done so far, but one thing which has not emerged to any very developed or sustained degree, despite the significance of the topic to the wider discipline, is a Christian critique of methodology. I suspect that many would regard this gap as confirmation that the idea of a Christian teaching method is a misplaced or even a silly one.

Third, it seems to me that in terms of Christian thinking about education the general state of play when it comes to the question of teaching methods is one of considerable confusion. I will illustrate that claim with two anecdotes. The first involves a friend of mine who attended a seminar hosted by the publishers of a certain set of Christian curriculum materials. The speaker began by assuring his audience that the teaching method on which the materials were based was the teaching method which God had revealed to this generation of his church. The audience should therefore be very careful. They may find themselves during the seminar having critical thoughts about the materials - these should be resisted as temptations from Satan. The matter should not be taken lightly - when the Israelites grumbled against Moses while crossing the desert, the ground opened up and swallowed some of them, so if anyone should fail to heed the warning, God's judgement may come into their life.[2]

The other occasion was when I was asked by an experienced Christian language teacher in a church in Toronto about the research in which I was engaged at the time. When I tried to explain that I was looking at the connection between Christian belief and teaching methods in foreign

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[2] My thanks to Doug Blomberg for this story..

language education I was met with blank incomprehension. Her response was succinct and to the point: "Is there a Christian way to boil water?"

It seems that the range of views on the relationship between faith and method within the Christian community runs the full spectrum from all to nothing, from God's true teaching method to faint pity for anyone foolish enough to think that the question has any meaning. This makes communication on the subject peculiarly difficult - it is hard to say anything without finding oneself mentally placed by the hearer at some point to the right or left of them on the spectrum. Nevertheless, this is the topic which I will address in what follows. Time will prevent me from going into all of the detail I would like, but I hope to do three things in what follows. First, I will offer some reflections on the concept of method itself, and suggest some possible reasons for the extreme range of views among Christians. Second, I will review some recent discussions of the nature of methodology which have taken place in the literature on foreign language learning and TESOL, and suggest that there are things we can learn from those discussions which are relevant to the concerns of this conference. Third, I will put my money where my mouth is and offer some specific examples of where I think faith and method clash.

What is a "method"?

Donald Schön long ago pointed out that in tackling problems it can be more fruitful to focus first on how the problem has been posed than to set our sights immediately on solving it.[3] With this in mind, let's take a quick look at the ideas which are evoked in our minds when we label something an instance of `method'. Take a moment to reflect on how you would react if someone said "I have found a new way of practising my golf swing" and if they said "I have found a new

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[3] Schön, 1979; Schön, 1983.

method for practising my golf swing" - what are the differences in connotation?

The concept of method has played a prominent role in modern culture, and it has long been a favoured term for anything which is to have an air of rigour, of being based on something more systematic and reliable than custom and guesswork. To do something `methodically' is to do it with a level of self-discipline designed to ensure the desired results. Our culture's well-known faith in `the scientific method' is perhaps the most familiar example.

Now in order to play this kind of role, that of saving us from the messiness of custom, haphazardness and disagreements and of assuring the achievement of our goals, this thing called method needs to have certain characteristics.[4] Here are some of the characteristics associated with method as a modern scientific ideal:[5]

It must be *self-sufficient*, in the sense that it must admit nothing which is clouded in any way by custom, tradition, prejudice or any beliefs falling short of publicly verifiable certainty. It must avoid infiltration from these wellsprings of messiness, so that the results of its operation might be assured.

It must be open to rigorous, thorough and self-conscious *regulation*, so that no contaminations might creep into the process and compromise its validity. In other words, we need to be in control of the processes involved and able to check that they are proceeding in the designed manner.

It must be *repeatable* without variation, so that it can produce assured results at different times

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[4] A succinct and classic expression of the method ideal is to be found in Descartes, 1968. Descartes became convinced that "our beliefs are based much more on custom and example than on any certain knowledge", and resolved to remedy this by seeking the "true method of arriving at knowledge" (Descartes, 1968:39-40).

[5] Cf. Descartes, 1968; Dunne, 1993; Weinsheimer, 1985.

and in different places - this is necessary so that we can regulate it through rigorous checking. If it works in different ways in different times and places, it becomes very hard to check objectively.

It must also be ***comprehensive*** in its grasp, so that the results will not be threatened by our having missed out vital elements - we need to know that it takes all of the relevant factors into account and has them all under control.

These ideals, which together make up a vision of a self-consciously controlled, self-enclosed, ahistorical, repeatable, encompassing and certain method which might deliver certain desired outcomes, have been common enough themes in the modern period. It is therefore not surprising that attempts to ground teaching scientifically and to think of it in terms of method have often leaned towards the same mindset. Now I want us to notice two things about this in relation to today's topic. The first is the well-known fact that the early history of applied linguistics (which is, after all, still very recent) was permeated by the desire to achieve disciplinary respectability by placing things on a rigorous scientific footing. In the light of this it is no accident that the ideals of repeatability, assured results, rigorous checking, and the discovery of the one best comprehensive method have been very prominent. Until quite recently the quest was for the single correct method which, being the appliance of science, would guarantee results.

Second, it is woven into the very fabric of the concept of method as widely understood in modernity that it shuts out things like tradition, beliefs, personal commitments, variations in personal character, and so on. That is exactly what method is explicitly designed to do - it could not achieve the context-free repeatable rigour to which it aspires if it allowed these kinds of things to interfere. They are excluded not just accidentally or temporarily but *by definition*. On these terms, talk of a Christian method is a kind of nonsense, like talking about dry water or warm

snow. A modern method is simply not the kind of thing which can have the adjective "Christian" in front of it.

Here, I suggest, are some clues which make the two anecdotes which I offered earlier understandable. They represent two different responses to the underlying cultural sense of talking about teaching in terms of `method'. The one response senses that there is simply no logical space within the concept of `method' for talking about a role for particular beliefs and commitments. The other response senses that if a Christian teaching `method' is what our Christian convictions require us to look for, then there will be a single best, self-sufficient, totally reliable candidate. Both implicitly accept the modern method ideal - they simply respond in different directions. Both are facing a puzzle handed down by our intellectual history which is simply insoluble as long as its terms of reference are accepted.

The Demise of Method

Now if history had not moved on, this talk may have ended here. As this century has progressed, however, it has become more and more clear that there is no necessity to accept the terms of reference. In fact it may turn out to be quite unwise to do so. Some of the century's important thinkers have devoted considerable energy to dismantling the modern ideal of guaranteed success through the application of method. Alongside the general critique offered by figures such as Gadamer, Polanyi and Feyerabend, which will have to be passed over here,[6] there has been a more specific echo of the general unease in the literature on language teaching.

The quest for the one true method gave way in the 1970s to a range of different methods, each

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[6] Feyerabend, 1975; Gadamer, 1989; Polanyi, 1958; cf. also Dunne, 1993; Plantinga, 1996; Weinsheimer, 1985.

offering itself as a comprehensive package, which refused to be reconciled to one another. The differences between, say, humanistic and behaviouristic methods were at least in part ideological differences, making it hard to retain the pretence of cold objectivity. There has also since then been a growing realisation that the results of attempts to empirically compare methods to see which worked best were quite meagre and problematic. It was difficult to know exactly what to compare, and harder still to make empirically valid generalisations.[7] Questions also began to be asked about the politics of method - were methods not entities designed by (predominantly male) academics and handed down for implementation to (predominantly female) practitioners for implementation? Did this not guarantee neglect of the more localised wisdom gained by practitioners in the concrete context of the classroom? [8]

Fuelled by these concerns, to which we can add a more general postmodern suspicion of claims to be able to arrive at the single best way for other people to proceed, a growing number of articles have appeared which argue that thinking of foreign language teaching in terms of method was a mistake.[9] They suggest that whatever usefulness the concept of method might have elsewhere, what goes on when we teach languages is not best described as an instance of `method'. In fact describing it in that way may blind us to its true nature. What we should therefore be doing now is looking for more adequate ways to characterise what goes on when we teach in what Kumaravadivelu has termed the "post-method condition".[10]

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[7] See e.g. Brumfit, 1984; Brumfit, 1991; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Swaffar, Arens, & Morgan, 1982.

[8] See e.g. Pennycook, 1989; Pennycook, 1990.

[9] See e.g. Brumfit, 1991; Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Larsen-Freeman, 1991; Molero, 1989; Pennycook, 1989; Pennycook, 1990; Prabhu, 1987; Prabhu, 1990; Richards, 1984; Richards & Rodgers, 1982; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Swaffar et al., 1982; also Bartolome, 1994; Zahorik, 1986. This discussion is obviously related to the contemporary angst concerning the relationship between applied linguistics and the language teacher. See e.g. Kramsch, 1995a; O'Driscoll, 1993.

[10] Kumaravadivelu, 1994.

Now instead of turning this into a literature review, I am going to propose as a working model a view of the structure of teaching which I think is consistent with much of the current discussion, and which draws from it at various points. I also think that it is consistent with a number of the more thoughtful products of the debate concerning faith-learning integration, though I will not have time to draw out the parallels here.[11] Its relevance to our concern with whether and how our teaching can be Christian will, I hope, speedily become apparent.

Let me start with a short but classic article published in 1963 by Edward Anthony titled "Approach, method, technique."[12] Since the words "method" and "technique" have too many unhelpful connotations in the present context, I will go along with Richards and Rodgers and substitute *approach*, *design* and *procedure* in what follows.

Anthony envisaged three levels of description which are needed in order to make sense of a stretch of teaching. *Procedures* are specific actions applied in the classroom to achieve specific objectives. They might include administering a quiz, showing an image or asking a question. A casual visitor to a class sees mostly procedures.[13] These do not, however, occur randomly. They are organized and patterned in certain ways, making up a way of teaching which has an overall consistency and direction. This general way of teaching, or constellation of procedures, is what

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[11] See e.g. Marsden, 1997; Wolterstorff, 1984; Wolterstorff, 1999; cf. Smith, 1995.

[12] Anthony, 1963.

[13] Anthony, 1963:66.

is meant by *design*. A design is, however, in turn dependent on a wider framework of assumptions and beliefs; it is a way of realizing a certain vision of things. The overall coherence of a design, in spite of the variety of procedures which it may include, derives from its consistency with a set of beliefs about the nature of language and of language learning. This wider framework is what is meant by an *approach*. Examples would include the conviction underpinning various humanistic approaches that the individual's emotions should be given priority, or the assumptions about the importance of habit formation which informed behaviouristic approaches. To quote Anthony, an approach "states a point of view, a philosophy, an article of faith - something which one believes but cannot necessarily prove".[14] In sum, then, *procedures* are individual actions in the classroom, *designs* are repeatable patterns in the way teaching takes place, and *approaches* are the background beliefs, orientations and commitments which give rise to one pattern rather than another:
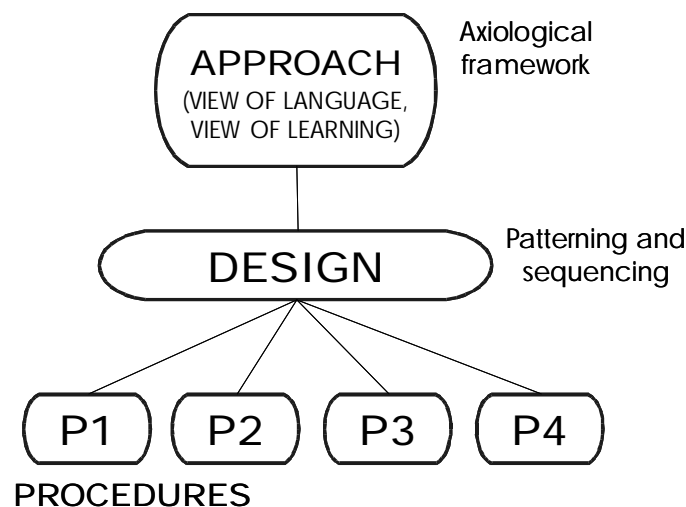
Taking this fairly simple model as a basis, let me make three observations concerning its relevance to our theme.

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[14] Anthony, 1963:64.

First, although the point was not drawn out by Anthony, the model can be construed to allow for two-way interaction between the levels. It need not imply that theory straightforwardly determines practice. Sometimes a particular conviction which I hold will lead me to draw the procedures which I have at my disposal into a certain kind of pattern, to design things a certain way. Sometimes my time spent in the classroom will throw up experiences which cause me to rethink some of my cherished ideas. (How many of us have all the same beliefs about learners that we had when we started teaching?) Sometimes we may discover a new procedure through happy improvisation and only later work out where it fits in the design and develop some theories to explain why it works. A design does not simply follow by fixed logical steps from a set of beliefs - it involves fallible creativity and trying things out, designing things and then seeing what they do. There might be several different designs which are equally consistent with the same approach. This is not a deductive model - it takes seriously the loose flow of ongoing adjustment which takes place between the various levels.
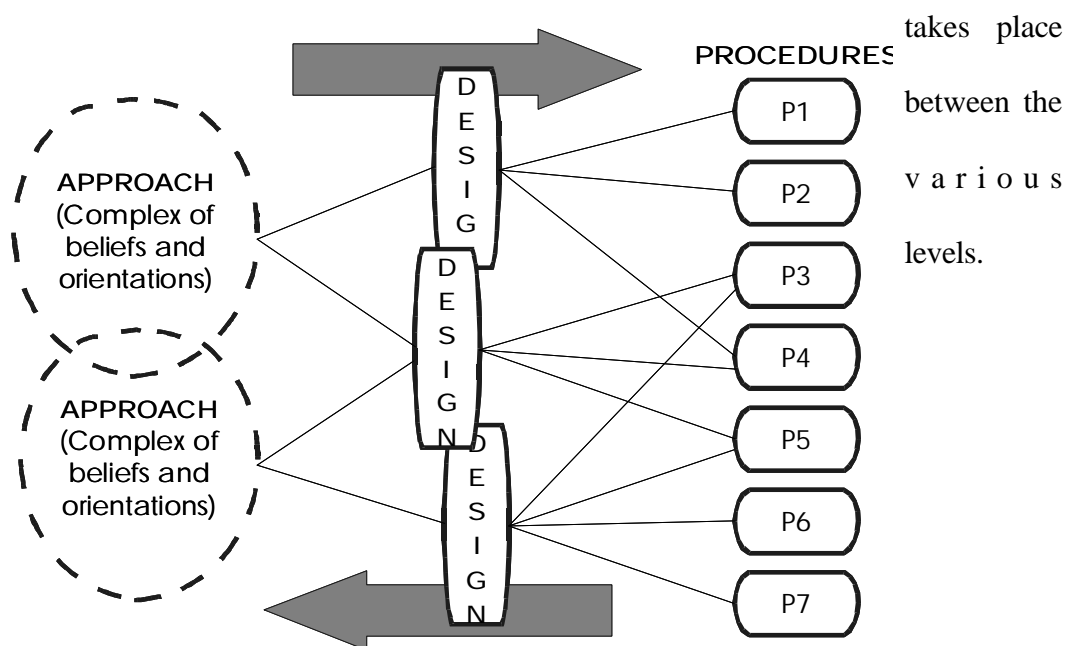
Second, even though there is not a tight deductive relationship between the different levels, different approaches are, nonetheless, related to different ways of designing what goes on in the classroom. The main place where this shows up is not so much in the individual procedures used (all teaching draws from a broad pool of available procedures) as in the *patterns* which emerge. Seating learners in a circle or asking them to think of a topic for discussion are procedures which could be woven into a variety of designs. If the class are regularly seated in a circle and the teacher consistently remains outside it and refuses to take the initiative in terms of shaping the conversation then we have something which much more clearly expresses the philosophy of Community Language Learning. Much as the same notes, rhythms and instruments can be variously combined into very different pieces of music, what makes one design different from another is basically the way in which a range of procedures is configured in the light of various convictions, yielding an educational experience with particular emphases and priorities.[15]

Third, and here is the crucial point in terms of where I am headed, Anthony's description of an approach as containing beliefs about language and about language learning was far too narrow, and the tendency in later discussions to interpret this as meaning theories from linguistics and psycholinguistics is even less adequate.[16] Once the basic model outlined here is in place, then the question to be asked when it comes to determining what might be part of an approach must surely be: could it influence the shape of a design? Could it influence the ways in which we go about putting together stretches of teaching and learning? Once the question is put this way a range of possibilities open up - our personality and character qualities, the spirit in which we teach, the spirit of the age, our professional socialisation, and so on. These possibilities must at least

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[15] Brumfit, 1991; Swaffar et al., 1982.

[16] Richards, 1984:7; Richards & Rodgers, 1986:16-19

potentially include Christian beliefs, as at least one mainstream applied linguist seems to have recently recognised.[17]

Now we could spend much more time teasing out the detail, but for now I simply want to suggest that something like this more flexible model of what is involved in constructing a way of teaching could help us to ask more meaningful questions about the relationship between faith and the ways in which we teach. It seems to me that past discussions have often unconsciously assumed that this would involve specifying a particular set of procedures which were Christian. This conjures up the curious image of a Christian teacher who holds the chalk differently, or uses a different kind of audio equipment. A few doggedly seek to realise this (or speak as if that were what they were trying to do), searching for God's teaching method. Most find the idea so hard to imagine that the question behind it comes to seem absurd. What I am suggesting is that the question was OK, but some of the mental furniture associated with a particular understanding of teaching as method got in the way of us being able to make adequate sense of it. The model which I have sketched, which emphasises the creative interaction between conviction and experience and the importance of attending to patterns rather than just individual techniques, promises better fruit. I will back up this assertion with three examples, one from my own classroom and two from the literature.

"It's OK to lie in French"

Some years ago I was teaching French one morning to a class of 14 year olds. We were practising for the oral examination which was to come at the end of the course, part of which involved answering a range of personal questions - Where do you live? How old are you? What do your

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[17] Davies, 1993.

parents do? - and so on. One student was having difficulty remembering the word for an obscure parental occupation. This was not unusual - it is rare for the lives of all students to fit neatly into the basic range of vocabulary provided by the course materials. I responded in the usual way, which is to say in the way which I had learned from my training and from working with colleagues in this, my first school. I suggested that for the purposes of the exercise the student say something different - after all, the examiner would not really be interested in what this child's parent did for a living. He or she would just want to hear a correct French phrase in order to evaluate it for complexity, accuracy and pronunciation. This fitted in with a broader pattern of advice which I picked up as part of the professional wisdom of my teaching context - if, for instance, students were asked to design family trees in the target language, beginner level learners with particularly complex families were advised to simplify the facts for the purposes of language practice. Such suggestions had never seemed problematic to me before - after all, the main purpose of what we were doing was language practice.

On this particular day, however, I began to wonder whether the ethics of communication did not matter even in language practice. Wouldn't it sit better with my Christian convictions to teach students to wrestle with the language they are learning until they can express themselves with integrity?

When I shared these thoughts with colleagues, they did not see things the same way. They objected that I was confusing practice with real communication - the examples I had in mind were just role play, and it was unfair to weaker learners to expect truthfulness. They also pointed out that I had no right to expect my students to honestly divulge personal information in the classroom setting if they had reasons to prefer not to. Both objections seemed to have something to them, and I had to think again.

Further reflection, however, and an interesting paper on the subject presented at this conference some years ago by Patricia Myhren, made me think I still had a point. For one thing, we claimed to be practising for real communication with native speakers, and authenticity was a current buzz-word. Practising in a way which implied that it did not matter what you said to foreigners did not seem the most helpful approach. What's more, if I asked personal questions but then sent the message that I did not care what the answer was, what did this tell students about my interest in them as people?

These worries were strengthened by observing the responses of students. I found that in various different classes where flexibility with the facts was encouraged it was not too long before one student or another would come up with the question "it's O.K. to lie in French, isn't it?" I began to realise that students did not necessarily interpret tasks the way I did. For instance, if I asked eleven-year-olds to do a class survey about pets, it was not uncommon for some to do the survey in their mother tongue and proudly present me with the results. I thought we were rehearsing some phrases - they thought they were doing a survey. It was all very well for me to have fine distinctions between role-play and real communication, but what if pupils perceived themselves as lying? How, then could I address this while still taking the other objection seriously, that learners should not be expected to divulge personal information in class if they have reasons not to?

I began to make various adjustments to my teaching practices. When setting up a task such as writing about family or a recent holiday I began to tell students from the outset that they could either engage in personal communication, which meant finding the language they needed to be accurate, or they could produce a piece of fiction. Both were fine, but the distinction was made explicit. I began to actively teach strategies for evading unwelcome questions politely in the target

language. Some students began using phrases such as "I'm afraid that's none of your business" with enthusiasm!

Whether these were the best or the only adjustments which could have been made is not the main point for present purposes. The main point is that reflection on a Christian belief, in this case a belief in a particular ethic of communication, led to modifications in the way of teaching which I had learned from my training and from colleagues. It led to these modifications not by some mechanical process of deduction, but through dialogue with colleagues, listening to and observing the reactions of learners, and trying out changes to see what difference they would make.[18]

"Without any feeling of guilt"

My next example is taken from the writings of Charles Curran on Community Language Learning. One of the things which makes Curran's pedagogy unusual is that it comes with an explicit claim to be a Christian teaching method. Curran argued that unlike behaviourist and cognitivist alternatives, his pedagogy took the whole person seriously, aiming to "incorporate teachers and learners together in a deep relationship of human belonging, worth and sharing,"[19] and was therefore more faithful to a Judeo-Christian perspective than other methodologies. We can't explore the implications and validity of that claim in detail here; let's instead zoom in on an interesting detail.

Curran found that as learners moved through the five stages of learning which were supposed to take place in his highly learner-centred, non-directive classroom there were particular problems around stage three. This was the stage when the learner was to move into a measure of

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[18] For further discussion, see Myhren, 1991; Smith, 1997a.

[19] Curran, 1972:29.

independence from the facilitator, having acquired sufficient language ability to sustain conversation.[20] Curran (and others)[21] found that by stage three the Community Language Learning process led to the expression of anger and hostility against the facilitator and against other members of the group. How does Curran respond to this? By embracing it and asserting that there is to be freedom for the open expression of hostility towards others "without any feeling of guilt or the need to apologize afterwards".[22]

Now what would lead someone trying to construct a Christian pedagogy, for which one might expect ideas such as love, sin, repentance and forgiveness to be important, to make this kind of move? The answer in Curran's case seems to be the ideas about the nature of the person which he adopted. For his view of personhood he relied significantly on Carl Rogers and Jean-Paul Sartre, with their different versions of existentialism.[23] The picture which he drew from them can be briefly sketched as follows. The person begins life as an autonomous individual with a desire to be infinite, a basic will to power. Sooner or later, this individual runs up against other people, who represent a threat to her being - they threaten to limit her sovereignty, to take her world away from her.[24]

The way to enable the person to grow beyond this sense of being fundamentally threatened by others is, for Rogers and Curran, to withdraw from making any judgements about the learner and

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[20] Curran, 1972; Curran, 1982:128-135.

[21] See Bolitho, 1982.

[22] Curran, 1969:219; Curran, 1972:102.

[23] Rogers, 1961; Sartre, 1957. It is less common to think of Rogers as an existentialist, but once allowance is made for the replacement of Sartrean pessimism with Rogerian optimism, the basic structure of their views is remarkably similar. Cf. May, 1969.

[24] See Sartre, 1966 [1956]:342-344, 352-354.

instead provide supportive, non-directive warmth and affirmation. This is intended to remove the sense of threat by affirming the desire for self-assertion. This is why the facilitator must remain maximally passive during the early stages of the learning process. Since there is a basic trust in the inherent goodness of the person, it is assumed that the end result will be warm community.

Once again there is all sorts of further detail which we could discuss, but I think I have said enough to indicate roughly why Curran dealt with hostility in the way he did, and to show that this is not an isolated matter but part of the wider fabric of his pedagogy.[25] Curran worked with a set of assumptions about people which were drawn from existentialism, assumptions which emphasize the normality of the autonomous individual's will to power, and which seem to me to be seriously out of tune with a Christian perspective. These assumptions led him to design his teaching practices in a way which resulted in the affirmation of interpersonal hostility and the denial of any need for repentance or forgiveness in such cases. The fact that throughout this process Curran understood himself to be designing a self-consciously Christian pedagogy ought to give us cause for concern and for careful self-examination.

"Struggle is the educational enterprise *per se*"

Lest it be objected that Community Language Learning is somewhat past its sell-by date, let me finish with a much more current example. One of Claire Kramsch's suggested classroom activities involves two learners telling each other stories simultaneously, each working to interrupt the other or even shout the other down in an attempt to impose their version on the other.[26] Now why would a teacher set up a learning activity in this way? It might, of course, be just an isolated piece

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[25] For more detailed analysis and critique, see Smith, 1997c.

[26] Kramsch, 1993:95.

of fun, but in Kramsch's case the intentions are much more serious and, like the example which I took from Curran, this single activity is part of a wider pattern in which conflict is affirmed. Once again, some basic assumptions about what it is to be human are involved.

Where Curran drew from existentialist sources, Kramsch's work draws from the tradition of critical pedagogy.[27] This yields a view of the person which runs something like this. We are born into a culture and a language not of our own making, one already inhabited by the ideological accents, the ideas, metaphors and categories of others.[28] We can have no selfhood outside this setting, yet it fundamentally disempowers us - how are we to find and establish our own voice when our very selfhood is formed by the ideological discourses of others?[29] The disempowerment is compounded in the educational setting, where we find ourselves subject to the culture of the educational institution, and when we encounter a foreign language we find ourselves being asked to take on yet another way of speaking which was created not by ourselves, but by others.[30] Our own meanings come into confrontation with those of the native speakers.[31]

All of this invites a question which is basic to critical pedagogy - how can I become critical of my culture's frames of reference when it is those same frames of reference which have shaped my subjectivity?[32] The answer offered is that culture is not a seamless robe - it is made up of a multitude of conflicting voices. It is this conflict of voices which creates tears in the cultural

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[27] See e.g. Freire, 1996 [1970]; Giroux, 1997; Giroux & McLaren, 1989.

[28] Kramsch, 1991:226; Kramsch, 1993:43.

[29] Kramsch, 1993:238.

[30] Kramsch, 1991:221; Kramsch, 1993:23, 247; Kramsch, 1995b:9.

[31] Kramsch, 1993:23-6, 226-8.

[32] Freire, 1996 [1970]; Kramsch, 1993:202; Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992:21.

fabric, openings where we can struggle to establish our own voices and where we achieve moments of insight into the frameworks of meaning which we had taken for granted until conflict brought them into focus.[33] Conflict therefore becomes a vital educational resource. Learning is a struggle for control, a fight to seize the power of discourse.[34] Focussing on and even fostering certain kinds of conflict can begin to sensitise learners to the cultural meanings which reside in their ways of speaking, showing them the differences which undermine their efforts to encode their ideas into a foreign language. For this reason Kramsch suggests that we should emphasise the pleasure which comes from taking other people's meanings and making them ours rather than theirs, and that we should actively encourage learners to play power games with each other and with the teacher.[35] The learning activity which I sketched a few moments ago is part of this wider pattern - it enacts a particular understanding of communication as basically made up of an irreconcilable conflict between different voices. As Kramsch puts it, "this struggle is the educational enterprise *per se*."[36]

What are the effects on students where conflict is taken as the basic metaphor for learning? Kramsch herself suggests that the approach is likely to leave learners in the position of cultural migrants, left "betwixt and between, no longer at home in their original culture, nor really belonging to the host culture", perhaps even fearing a loss of self.[37]

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[33] Kramsch, 1993:67; Kramsch & von Hoehne, 1995.

[34] Giroux & McLaren, 1989:144; Kramsch & McConnell-Ginet, 1992:12.

[35] Kramsch, 1993:49, 55, 239, 246, cf. 15, 30. Ironically, given the many deep differences in their basic philosophies, Kramsch ends up echoing Curran's basic struggle with an opposition between individual autonomy and connection with others, here construed as social control.

[36] Kramsch, 1993:239.

[37] Kramsch, 1993:234, 69n.5.

Now I find Kramsch's work very interesting and have learned much from it, but I am not sure that Christians can go along with some of its basic assumptions. Given the fallenness of our world we can agree that conflict lies all around, but if we believe in a good creation and a dawning renewal of all things in love, can we agree that conflict is locked into the very nature of communication and of education and that it should be fostered? Is encouraging learners to play power games with one another consistent with Christian education? Can we with Kramsch take "a philosophy of conflict as a point of departure" and "irreducible confrontation" as the goal?[38] Here again it seems to me that there is a clear case for the claim that Christian beliefs can be relevant to a critique of a proposed foreign language pedagogy.[39]

Conclusions

So where does this get us? I have tried to show that the idea of methodology as a timeless, context-free, reliable road to results, one to which the concerns of faith are in principle irrelevant, is not only unhelpful and rapidly becoming outdated, it is downright wrong. All kinds of very unmethodological factors go into shaping our ways of teaching. Saying this, however, does not commit me to the quest for the unique Christian method different in every way from all others. Nor does it commit me to a position which says Christians can't use ideas from this or that methodology - as far as I'm concerned we need all the good ideas we can get. What it does commit me to is asking questions about the connections between basic assumptions about the nature of persons, of communication, of relationships, and the like, and the patterns which emerge in pedagogical proposals and practices. It commits me to being interested in the other effects

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[38] Kramsch, 1993:1, 231.

[39] For a more detailed discussion of the issues raised here and of other aspects of Kramsch's work, see Smith, 1997b.

which certain ways of teaching have on learners beyond the narrow concerns of second language acquisition, and to being ready to make creative adjustments to make my pedagogy work with instead of against my Christian convictions.

It also suggests possibilities for further research. I mentioned at the start that the work presented at these gatherings over the past decade has, with a few exceptions, been strong in areas such as literature and culture but has left the question of methodology under-explored. Where methodology has been the theme, it has mostly been in terms of presenting good ideas rather than in terms of Christian critique. Presenting good ideas is in itself a fine thing, but the examples which I have been describing suggest that there may also be a need for more Christian research into the basic assumptions which shape pedagogical options, the ways in which different ways of teaching are experienced and responded to by learners, and how these relate to Christian faith. Such research would ask questions of different ways of teaching language which do not only focus on linguistic matters. I would like to leave with you the suggestion that we need more of this kind of research, that by engaging in it we could make a significant contribution to the wider foreign language teaching world, and that no-one else is going to do it for us.

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