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IMPROVING THE METHODOLOGY OF DEVELOPING THE CREATIVE PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY OF FUTURE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

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Abstract. This article substantiates directions for improving the methodology of developing the creative pedagogical activity of future English language teachers. The study proceeds from a feature distinguishing the language lesson from most others, namely that learner output cannot be fully anticipated, so that improvisation is constitutive of the work rather than incidental to it. The author advances the attention thesis, according to which creative response is possible only where routine operations have become automatic, since the attention of a novice teacher is otherwise consumed by instruction-giving, grouping, timing and error treatment; it follows that the route to creativity passes through the formation of routines rather than around them. A four-level model of creative pedagogical activity is elaborated, together with six directions for improving the methodology and a system of assessment in which the justification of a pedagogical decision and the learner response it produces replace the originality of the artefact as the criterion. The polemic between B. Kumaravadivelu and R. Ellis concerning the autonomy of the teacher and the authority of research-based principles is subjected to critical examination.

Keywords: creative pedagogical activity, future English language teachers, improvisation, teaching routines, attention, task design, postmethod, instructed language learning, teacher cognition, microteaching, materials adaptation, assessment of pedagogical decisions.

INTRODUCTION

The work of the foreign language teacher differs from that of colleagues in most other subjects in one respect of decisive methodological importance: the output of the learners cannot be fully anticipated. In a lesson devoted to a mathematical procedure the range of correct and incorrect responses is finite and known in advance; in a lesson devoted to communication in English the utterance a learner produces may contain an unexpected error, an unforeseen question or a formulation opening a direction the teacher had not planned. The language lesson is therefore irreducibly unpredictable, and the capacity to respond productively to what was not foreseen is a condition of competent practice rather than an ornament of mastery.

Creative pedagogical activity, understood in this subject-specific sense, comprises several distinguishable capacities. It includes the design of communicative tasks addressed to difficulties actually diagnosed in a group rather than assumed by a textbook; the adaptation of materials produced elsewhere to the linguistic and cultural situation of the local classroom; the construction of conditions in which learners have a genuine reason to speak where English is not the language of the street; and the improvised management of interaction as it unfolds. It does not consist in decorating the lesson with entertaining activities, and the conflation of the two has damaged the professional understanding of creativity in language teaching.

The preparation of future teachers for such activity encounters a difficulty that is rarely stated explicitly. Students are urged to be creative from the beginning of their teaching practice, yet the attention of a novice in the classroom is almost entirely consumed by operations that an experienced teacher performs without deliberation: formulating an instruction so that it is

understood at the first attempt, organising pairs and groups without losing control of time, deciding whether to correct an error and at what moment, monitoring the class while attending to an individual learner. Attention is a finite resource, and creative response requires some of it to be free. It follows that the path to creativity in language teaching runs through the automatisation of routines rather than around it, and that a methodology which demands originality before routines have been formed demands the impossible.

Against this requirement the existing organisation of preparation reveals characteristic weaknesses. Courses in methodology transmit descriptions of methods, so that the student acquires knowledge about teaching rather than the capacity to teach; teaching practice is short and is frequently assessed by compliance with a plan agreed in advance, which penalises precisely the departures in which creative response consists; students are rarely required to proceed from a diagnosed difficulty to a task designed to address it, although this is the central operation of the profession; and creativity, where assessed at all, is assessed as the visual originality of materials rather than as the quality of the reasoning behind them.

For the Republic of Uzbekistan the question possesses considerable practical weight. The learning of English has become a national priority, demand for qualified teachers exceeds supply in many regions, the content of foreign language education is being reoriented towards international frameworks of communicative proficiency, and the certification of teachers has been systematised.

The scholarly problem of the study arises from the contradiction between the constitutive place of creative response in the work of the language teacher and an organisation of preparation that neither forms the routines upon which such response depends nor assesses the reasoning in which it is expressed. The aim of the article is to substantiate directions for improving the methodology of developing the creative pedagogical activity of future English language teachers. The tasks were: to delimit creative pedagogical activity in its subject-specific sense; to establish the relation between the automatisation of routines and creative response; to elaborate its levels and the corresponding directions of methodological improvement; and to determine the criteria of assessment.

The novelty consists in substantiating the attention thesis, according to which the formation of routines is a precondition rather than an obstacle of creative pedagogical activity; in a four-level model of that activity; in six directions for improving the methodology of its development; and in replacing the originality of the artefact by the justification of the decision and the learner response it produces as the criterion of assessment. The results may be drawn upon in the design of methodology courses, in the organisation of teaching practice and in the professional development of teacher educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Within Uzbek scholarship the foundation of the present study is supplied above all by the work of J.J. Jalolov on the methodology of teaching foreign languages. The scholar established the systematic description of the aims, content, principles and means of foreign language instruction in the national educational context, and his treatment of the relation between the linguistic material and the activity in which it is appropriated bears directly upon the present inquiry: a task is pedagogically justified not by its attractiveness but by the correspondence between the operations it requires of the learner and the linguistic capacity it is intended to form. This criterion is precisely what distinguishes the design of communicative tasks from the decoration of the lesson.

The second pillar is provided by the work of O‘. Hoshimov and I. Yoqubov on the methodology of teaching English, in which the general principles of foreign language instruction

are specified for the particular conditions of the Uzbek classroom, including the absence of a natural English-speaking environment, the influence of the first language and the organisation of practice within limited lesson time. Their attention to the adaptation of methods to local conditions supports the position advanced below that the central creative operation of the teacher is adaptation rather than invention ex nihilo. The value dimension of the question is illuminated by contemporary research on education and worldview: S. Ergashbaev demonstrates that stable orientations are formed through sustained processes of continuous education and, in a further study, identifies independent critical reflection as a central outcome, while M.M. Mirzaolimjon og‘li and E. Shohbozbek disclose the institutional context of the reform of higher pedagogical education.

Within international scholarship the problem has been framed through several traditions. B. Kumaravadivelu advanced the postmethod condition, in which the transmissible method is replaced by the teacher’s own strategic construction of practice under the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility. R. Ellis, by contrast, derived from research into instructed second language acquisition a set of principles that instruction should satisfy irrespective of the method adopted. S. Borg established that what teachers do is mediated by what they think and believe, so that methodological innovation that leaves beliefs untouched produces superficial change. J. Richards and T. Farrell systematised the procedures of professional development for language teachers, among them microteaching, peer observation and collaborative lesson design. D. Allwright proposed exploratory practice as a form of practitioner research integrated into teaching rather than added to it. The gap addressed by the present article is the absence of a methodology that relates the development of creative pedagogical activity to the formation of the routines upon which it depends.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundation of the study is constituted by the systemic approach, which made it possible to treat the methodological preparation of the future English teacher as an integral system uniting theoretical courses, microteaching, teaching practice and reflective procedures, so that a change introduced into any component alters the effect of the others; within this framework the activity approach performed the leading function, since professional capacities are formed only in activity of the corresponding structure, while the competence approach supplied the expression of results in terms of demonstrable performance rather than of knowledge about methods. The theoretical analysis of linguodidactic, pedagogical and psychological literature served to reconstruct the conceptions of creativity, improvisation and routine relevant to language teaching. The comparative method juxtaposed the approaches to the preparation of language teachers adopted in Uzbek and international traditions, while content analysis of curricula, programmes of teaching practice and assessment criteria established how creativity is currently defined and evaluated. Pedagogical observation of lessons conducted by students during teaching practice, supplemented by the analysis of video recordings, was used to identify the operations that consume the attention of novices and the points at which planned lessons depart from the plan. Questioning of students and interviews with supervising teachers established their conceptions of creative teaching and the difficulties encountered. The analysis of lesson plans, designed tasks and adapted materials determined the level of pedagogical justification they contain. Pedagogical modelling yielded the four-level model and the system of assessment criteria, which the method of expert assessment verified. Elements of the pedagogical experiment, organised in ascertaining, formative and control stages, verified the proposed directions, and methods of mathematical statistics established the significance of the differences obtained. General scientific procedures of analysis and synthesis,

induction and deduction, abstraction and generalisation were applied at every stage and secured the coherence of the conclusions.

RESULTS

The study established a subject-specific definition of the creative pedagogical activity of the English language teacher as the capacity to construct and modify the conditions of language learning in response to what is actually occurring in the classroom, comprising the design of tasks addressed to diagnosed difficulties, the adaptation of materials to local conditions, the creation of genuine reasons for communication in the absence of a natural language environment and the improvised management of unforeseen learner output. The central theoretical result is the attention thesis: since creative response requires free attention and the attention of the novice is consumed by procedural operations, the formation of routines is a precondition of creativity rather than its opposite, and the methodology must establish an order of acquisition in which routines precede invention. On this basis a four-level model of creative pedagogical activity was elaborated. At the reproductive-adaptive level the student implements prepared materials and introduces only superficial modifications. At the combinatory level he assembles known techniques into new configurations to meet an objective he has formulated himself. At the constructive-designing level he proceeds from a diagnosed difficulty to an original task and justifies its design in linguodidactic terms. At the research-innovative level the student investigates a problem of his own practice, tests a solution and evaluates its effect upon learner performance. Six directions for improving the methodology follow from the model. The first is the early formation of routines through short repeated microteaching cycles devoted to single operations such as instruction-giving, the organisation of interaction and the treatment of error, with video recording and structured feedback. The second is the task-design workshop as the central form of methodological instruction, in which the student moves from an observed difficulty through a formulated objective to a designed task and a predicted learner response. The third is the priority of adaptation over invention at the initial stages, since adapting an existing material to a diagnosed need develops the same reasoning at a far lower cost of attention. The fourth is collaborative lesson design with joint observation, which externalises reasoning that remains tacit in individual planning. The fifth is a record of creative decisions kept during teaching practice, in which each departure from the plan is described with its occasion, the alternatives considered and the observed outcome. The sixth is the reform of assessment, whose criterion ceases to be the originality of the artefact and becomes the quality of the justification together with the learner response the decision produced. The principal risks identified were the assessment of creativity as visual novelty, the premature demand for independent design before routines have been formed, and the neglect of linguodidactic principles in the pursuit of freedom.

DISCUSSION

The results require to be situated within the principal contemporary controversy in language teaching methodology, namely the opposition between the position advanced by B. Kumaravadivelu and that defended by R. Ellis. In Beyond Methods, Kumaravadivelu argues that the concept of method has exhausted its usefulness, since any method is formulated by theorists remote from the classrooms in which it is applied and disregards the particularity of local conditions. In its place he proposes the postmethod condition, governed by the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility, in which the teacher is not an implementer of another's

design but the generator of his own theory of practice. The teacher, on this account, is autonomous by professional necessity rather than by concession.

R. Ellis approaches the question from the standpoint of research into instructed second language acquisition. His formulation of principles of instructed language learning is deliberately method-neutral, yet it is far from permissive: instruction must ensure that learners develop a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence, must focus attention upon form as well as meaning, must take account of the learner's built-in syllabus, must provide extensive input and opportunity for output, and must attend to the role of interaction. These principles are presented as empirically grounded generalisations about how languages are learned, and the implication is that pedagogical choices violating them will fail however well adapted to local circumstance. Autonomy, on this view, is exercised within constraints that research has established.

The substance of the disagreement concerns the source of the authority that governs pedagogical decision. For Kumaravadivelu it resides in the teacher's situated understanding of a particular group of learners in a particular social setting; for Ellis it resides in the accumulated findings of research into how acquisition proceeds. Two further positions clarify its application to teacher preparation. S. Borg's work on teacher cognition indicates that the choice is not made in the abstract: teachers filter both local observation and research findings through beliefs formed during their own schooling, so that a preparation which leaves those beliefs implicit will find its prescriptions quietly reinterpreted. D. Allwright's exploratory practice offers a procedural reconciliation, in which the teacher investigates the puzzles of his own classroom through the ordinary activities of teaching, generating local knowledge without abandoning systematic inquiry.

The position advanced in this article is that the controversy is resolved differently at different levels of professional development, which is precisely what the four-level model is designed to express. At the reproductive-adaptive and combinatory levels the student cannot yet generate a theory of practice, and research-based principles function as a protective framework within which routines are formed; Ellis's position governs these stages. At the constructive-designing and research-innovative levels the student possesses both the routines and the diagnostic capacity to read his own classroom, and the autonomy Kumaravadivelu describes becomes attainable and necessary. The improvement of the methodology therefore consists not in choosing between principle and autonomy but in sequencing them, and the criterion proposed above is the instrument by which the transition is made visible, since a justification invokes principle while the response reports particularity.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that creative pedagogical activity in the teaching of English is a condition of competent practice rather than an optional refinement of mastery, since the output of learners cannot be fully anticipated and the teacher must act upon what was not foreseen. Its development requires a methodology built upon an accurate understanding of the conditions under which creative response becomes possible.

The central theoretical result is the attention thesis: creative response requires free attention, the attention of the novice is consumed by procedural operations, and the formation of routines is therefore a precondition rather than an obstacle of creativity. From this follows a four-level model — reproductive-adaptive, combinatory, constructive-designing and research-innovative — and six directions of improvement: the early formation of routines through focused microteaching, the task-design workshop as the central form of instruction, the priority of adaptation over invention at the

initial stages, collaborative design with joint observation, a record of creative decisions kept during teaching practice, and the reform of assessment.

Assessment, in particular, must cease to reward the originality of the artefact and must evaluate instead the quality of the pedagogical justification together with the learner response the decision produced. The analysis of the controversy between the postmethod position and the principles of instructed language learning established that principle and autonomy are not alternatives but stages: research-based principles govern the early levels, while the autonomy of the teacher as generator of local theory becomes attainable at the higher ones. Further research might address the empirical measurement of the attention released by routine formation.

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