

Book Reviews

Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching

Kumaravadivelu, B.
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There are very few academic books that one can term exciting, and fewer still that one can safely predict will have a great impact on L2 teaching-learning in the twenty-first century. B. Kumaravadivelu's book about language teaching in the Post-Method era, *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching* is indeed such a book.

For over a century, language educators sought to solve the problems of language teaching by focusing their attention almost exclusively on Method. Traditionally, it was believed that if we followed the right set of teaching principles, it would lead to effective learning outcomes. However, this thinking has been questioned of late as we have witnessed the rise and fall of several methods in the recent history of language teaching-learning. Most of these methods were meant to produce fluent learners of L2, but evidently, this did not happen. Hence, there is disillusionment with 'method' as a means of solving teaching-learning problems. In this 'postmethod era', the attention has shifted from method to pedagogy, i.e. to the teaching-learning processes and the contribution of the teacher in these processes.

The timing of the book is just right. Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was a heightened awareness about the following aspects of the teaching process:

- There can be no designer method that will work for all the diverse contexts where L2 is taught.
- The dichotomy between theory and practice is false and harmful for the teachers. In fact, it results in an unequal power relationship between the teacher and the researcher. It is expected that the researcher supplies the methods which the teacher has to blindly follow in the classroom.
- It is the teacher in the classroom who best understands her students and their contexts. We need to not only privilege the learner but also the teacher as it is her beliefs, her reasoning and cognition which will shape and reshape the content and character of everyday teaching.

(cf. Kumaravadivelu, 2003)

The book is divided into 13 chapters. The first chapter deals with the general nature of teaching as a professional activity as it has developed over the years, and its role in shaping the nature and scope of education.

In chapter two, Kumaravadivelu discusses the limitation of the concept of 'method' and heralds the post-method pedagogy which he visualizes as: Particularity, Practicality and Possibility.

Particularity: The author seeks to facilitate a context-sensitive and location-sensitive pedagogy, where the teachers take into account the social, linguistic and cultural background of their learners in the teaching-learning process.

Practicality: The teachers are encouraged to theorize from their practices in their classrooms, and put into practice the theoretical insights gained from their classroom experience. This gives them autonomy and self-respect.

Possibility: The socio-political resources of learners are leveraged in the classroom ‘as a catalyst’ ‘for identity formation and social transformation’.

Kumaravadivelu concludes Chapter 2 by providing a framework consisting of ten macrostrategies: maximizing learning opportunities, maximizing perceptual mismatches, facilitating negotiated interaction, promoting learner autonomy, fostering language awareness, activating intuitive heuristics, contextualizing linguistic inputs, integrating language skills, ensuring social relevance and raising cultural consciousness. These ten macrostrategies, according to him, will help guide the salient features of post-method pedagogy in the classroom context.

The rest of the chapters (except the last one) discuss the macrostrategic framework in greater detail, and provide microstrategies and exploratory projects to show how a particular macrostrategy can be implemented in a classroom situation. One such strategy and its implementation in the classroom is presented here. In Chapter 3, “Maximizing Learning Opportunities”, Kumaravadivelu begins by critically reviewing earlier practices which reflected the limitations of the teacher, teaching materials and the syllabus. He examines how the teacher and learner can ‘generate learning opportunities’ both inside and outside the classroom. This, according to him, can be done by (a) maximizing learner involvement and (b) the right kind of teacher questions. Kumaravadivelu illustrates these two facets by giving several examples from his experiments. He talks of learner involvement outside the classroom which primarily consists of ways of connecting to the local as well as the global community. He then turns to the microstrategies which are designed for learners to generate learning opportunities for themselves and for their peers through participatory projects. Several projects are suggested which the teachers can adapt according to the learner

context as well as the linguistic and communicative level of the learner. The chapter concludes with response sheets which elicit the teachers’ perception of the ‘learning opportunities created’ and the learners’ perception of ‘learning opportunities utilized’. Interspersed in this chapter, as indeed in all of them, are reflective tasks for the teacher to pause and ponder over at crucial points of the text and critically evaluate the teaching-learning happening in her own context. These are placed in a box which also helps break the monotony of the page. For example, in Chapter 7 (p.158), the reflective task for the teacher is as follows:

Reflective task 7.2

If the educational institution you are associated with has an official policy of promoting a “standard” variety as opposed to a “non-standard variety” of a language, what are the ways in which you can be sensitive to those students who may speak a “non-standard” variety at home? How can you make use of the linguistic resources such learners bring to your class?

In the last Chapter, Kumaravadivelu shows how this approach can be used by the teachers to monitor their own teaching and theorize from their classroom experience.

This book is a must-read for all those engaged in teaching languages. *Beyond Methods* does not merely introduce an attractive and innovative idea or a series of ideas, but it actually hand holds a teacher through the process by explaining the ideas put forth, so that at the end of the book, the teacher is equipped to theorize from her professional experience.

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