Research articles

Values and Culture
Foreword

This second issue of CIEX Journal presents some of the most recent papers devoted to do research on the areas of language teaching and applied linguistics. This main goal emerged since it is necessary to promote research in these two areas of study. Besides, the founder of CIEX Miguel Murga Caro (RIP) was completely willing to promote critical and creative thinking in the students of Guerrero and even in the country. He wished to encourage teachers, students and professionals in the area to produce academic and research articles.

Therefore, in this issue, the journal will present research articles written by national and international researchers and specialists in the areas of the language teaching and applied linguistics. Furthermore, an essay written by Professor Miguel Murga Caro -who was also worried about the moral values crisis that we are living nowadays and wanted to make some changes in society through education- is presented in this issue. This paper is part of the legacy that Professor Murga left for all of us who will always think and remember him as a great educator, professional, father and friend.

About CIEX Journal team of editors, it is necessary to say that it is constituted by a group of national and international researchers in Foreign Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. The referees have analyzed each proposed article and generated some suggestions to improve those works. It is also necessary to mention, that the content of the articles reflect the authors’ research, perceptions, and/or opinions and does not necessarily represent the ideas or beliefs of the editors.

Finally, we want to thank the students, professors and CIEX Journal editorial committee for their contributions to this second issue. Also, we invite all the readers to contribute with articles to be submitted in a near future in order to be published in the next issue of this CIEX Journal; considering that your articles will definitely contribute to the individual growth and education of the readers: professors, researchers, students and professionals in the areas of language teaching and learning and applied linguistics.

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National and International Research Articles
Finding that Fine Balance Between Tradition and Innovation in the Language Classroom

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Abstract:
The rate of innovation in the language classroom has increased exponentially in the past decades, and teachers may feel pressured to use the latest technologies or approaches without any real evidence that these new methods are more effective. This paper considers innovation from the perspective of finding a balance in teaching between methods that have been developed over the years and newer approaches, and concludes that we will be better teachers if we are allowed to welcome innovation on our own terms.

Key words:
Innovation, language pedagogy, SLA, teaching methods, technology

Introduction

While few would argue that we should resist change just because we have always done something in a particular way, we seem to have swung too far now in the other direction and are not only encouraged but expected to use the most recent techniques in our language classrooms. The rate of innovation has increased exponentially in the past decades, and rather than using approaches that have been honed and developed over the years, teachers may feel pressure to implement the latest technology simply because it is available rather than because they feel this is the best method for their particular situation. There is also often a scramble to switch to a new teaching methodology, frequently without any real evidence that it is any more effective than the old ones. The unintended result of this emphasis on innovation may be that teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on the “how-tos” of the new technique instead of considering whether it will in fact improve their teaching. Much of the literature dealing with change in the classroom seems to start from the premise that innovation is desirable per se, but perhaps we need to challenge that assumption. This paper will examine the pros and cons of innovation in the language classroom, with the reminder that we will be better teachers if we can find a balance in teaching: rather than discarding methods that work simply because they have been used for a long time, we should choose to welcome innovation on our own terms and because it fits our needs and those of our students.

Much of what we do in the classroom involves finding a balance, between our own expectations and those of our students or the administration of our institution, between what we would like to do and what is in fact possible in practical terms, and between old and new, tradition and innovation. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of innovation which seems most relevant to language teaching is “A change made in the nature or fashion of anything; something newly introduced; a novel practice, method, etc.” In his overview of English Language Education innovation management literature, Alan Waters equates innovation with change, using the two terms interchangeably when referring to...
language pedagogy. (Waters 2009: 422). We should be aware of the nuances of these two words, though, as “innovation” is a word which normally carries positive connotations while “change” is neutral and could be for better or for worse.

Because there are so many possibilities for change, it can be an exciting time to be a teacher. Individual teachers often have a great deal of freedom to consider different approaches, and may only be limited in their choices by budget restrictions. They also have much more autonomy in decisions they make about what they do in the classroom. In fact, today’s classroom might be almost unrecognizable as such to a teacher from a different era.

**Innovations in language teaching**

The most obvious innovations have been in teaching approaches and methodology. Going back to the early to mid-20th century, students sat in rows and the teacher was an authoritative figure who directed operations in the classroom. During this period the grammar translation method, which was derived from the classical method of teaching Greek and Latin by using literary texts, gradually gave way to the Audio-Lingual method which began in WWII, grounded in the behaviourist psychology of B. F. Skinner. Skinner is known as the father of behaviourism, and he devised a theory of operant or instrumental conditioning rooted in positive and negative reinforcement; that is, correct responses are recognized and rewarded, and supposedly become habitual. Other methods for language teaching developed at this time included the Direct Method, which emphasized communication only in the target language.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was a shift from teacher-centred to learner- or knowledge-centred methods, influenced both by Chomsky’s (1957) theory of transformational grammar (that language is not a process of habit formation but that the individual has an underlying knowledge of abstract rules which allow for the creation of new utterances) and later by the sociolinguist focus on the humanistic element in language learning. The central philosophy of this era was embodied in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), described as a “post-method” view of language pedagogy. CLT focused on the learner and emphasized communication through classroom activities such as role plays and games. Concepts that emerged at this time included “student-centred learning”, which puts more responsibility on the learners themselves, who learn by doing rather than by performing tasks which have no relevancy to the context. During this period, there was less focus on the teacher, who took on the role of guide or facilitator.

Most recently, there has been a shift in language pedagogy from “method” or “approach” to what we might call a “philosophy” of teaching and learning. The theory of constructivism, which arose in the early 1990s, is an approach which focuses on the ways in which people create meaning through a series of individual constructs, or first-hand experiences, which are processed and compared to previously acquired knowledge and experience. This emphasis on personal experience highlights the role of the learner in controlling the selection of input. In the classroom, the learner’s role becomes that of active constructor rather than a passive reproducer. A constructivist approach involves open-ended learning and the active participation of students, who have a high degree of control over their choice of what information they require. CLT has been gradually replaced by Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which defined the rather vague goal of “communication” by adding a concrete outcome which can be evaluated. In TBLT attention to form, that is, specific grammatical and lexical features, as well as the communication of information are often both essential to the success of the task at hand.

There has been extensive research evaluating new teaching methods, and many of these studies do report positive results for innovative methods. For example, in a study on communicative-based curriculum innovations in 2010, Shauer found that teachers who understood CLT and managed to put its principles into practical action significantly improved student language learning and motivation, resulting in both cognitive change and affective change.

Another area in which the classroom has changed considerably from when 19th century teachers had to bring in coal for the stoves can be seen as we walk into a classroom these days: the physical surroundings are very different. Comfort obviously has an enormous impact on how well both teacher and students perform: it is hard to do your best if you...
are too hot or cold or cannot see what you are working on. But because language is a communicative activity, being able to interact easily and comfortably with the teacher and fellow students can also affect how successfully this takes place. One innovation in this area has been “nodal” chairs, designed to move easily with room underneath for students’ backpacks and which can be moved together to form a common workspace. Gurzynski-Weiss et al (2015) compared interaction and the use of space in traditional and innovative classrooms, and found that classroom space design may encourage teachers to develop more innovative lesson plans.

**Why innovate?**

Hargreaves and Fink (2006: 1) observe that “Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement and extraordinarily difficult to sustain”. Teachers may feel pressure to make changes on the assumption that they will lead to improvement. On the whole, innovation or change is regarded as positive. Innovators are considered to be people who are energetic and enthusiastic, while those who are more hesitant are described in negative terms as being “resistant” to change rather than “questioning” or “analysing the impact of” the proposed innovation.

It is easy to find examples of this kind of negative portrayal of traditionalists as being backward-thinking and the corollary that change is always better. Jee (2014: 2) asserts that “...innovative teaching and learning methods using various types of technology have been developed, and this has led to an improvement of instruction in many academic fields”, while Alemi (2010: 765) claims that “Language teachers have always been concerned about the inadequacy of conventional methods of language teaching in education systems.” Pellerin also equates the traditional or conventional with the antiquated and undesirable: “old teaching beliefs” (2012: 18) (all italics mine).

Leaving aside the top-down changes in the education system that are made at higher levels, such as changes to educational policy and syllabus design, there are two basic reasons why teachers may decide to (or be expected to) make changes to their classroom practice, one a negative impulse and one positive:

- Dissatisfaction with the status quo: the amount of dissatisfaction as well as its causes may vary considerably, requiring negotiation and compromise.
- Impetus for change: this ranges from minor things such as a well-used textbook being no longer available to more sweeping changes like the implementation of a new technology. For example, when computers became widely available there was a period of some confusion and angst as teachers grappled with these strange new companions: some teachers took to them immediately, some were more hesitant and some were outright resistant! (see Waters 2009: 425ff). Should these individual reactions be valued in a positive or negative way?

When innovations fail, the tendency is to blame the way in which they were implemented rather than questioning the idea itself and where it came from: did it arise from a perceived need or was it a top-down decision by policy-makers? It is not easy in any case to implement changes, and even a minor change like deciding to use more authentic materials in class may require a significant time commitment on the part of the teacher. To return to the observation by Hargreaves and Fink that ‘Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement and extraordinarily difficult to sustain’, this diagram illustrates the many policy levels that affect changes made on the micro level in the classroom:

[Hierarchy of interrelating subsystems affecting the operation of an innovation. (Waters 2009: 428 from Kennedy 1988)]

**Pros and cons of approaches in vogue**

This section will examine some of the pedagogical approaches that have been tried over the past decades. It is important to keep in mind that just because something is new does not mean it is necessarily better; it might just be the same product with a different wrapper in the same way that
the traditional PPP (present-practice-produce) paradigm has become OHE (observe-hypothesize-experiment), essentially the same idea using 21st century techniques. Weideman (2014) argues that most historically significant turning points in applied linguistic design, from audio-lingualism through CLT, demonstrate continuity with previously designed solutions.

Some methods that were hailed as innovative in their time now seem antiquated and faintly ridiculous. The Silent Way originated in the 1970s and was popular through the 1980s. The three basic tenets of the approach are that learning is facilitated if the learner discovers rather than remembers or repeats, that learning is aided by physical objects, and that problem-solving is central to learning. The use of the word “silent” is also significant, as Silent Way is based on the premise that the teacher should be as silent as possible in the classroom in order to encourage the learner to produce as much language as possible. Suggestopedia, another method developed in the 1970s, is possibly the oddest of the language teaching methods of all time. The approach was based on the power of suggestion in learning, the notion being that positive suggestion would make the learner more receptive and, in turn, stimulate learning in a relaxed but focused state. In order to create this relaxed state in the learner and to promote positive suggestion, Suggestopedia makes use of music, a comfortable and relaxing environment, and a relationship between the teacher and the student that is akin to the parent-child relationship. Music, in particular, is central to the approach. Unlike other methods and approaches, there is no apparent theory of language in Suggestopedia and no obvious order in which items of language are presented. Most of these “designer” methods were completely teacher-centred, although they claimed to put the student at the centre of his/her learning experience.

On the other hand, some methods that fell out of favour during the vogue for the communicative approach in the 1980s and 1990s have been quietly reinstated if indeed they ever completely ceased to be used. A good example of this is the grammar-translation method. In its 21st century form, this consists of presenting the rules of a particular item of grammar, showing how it is used in a sample text, and practicing using the item through writing sentences and translating it into the mother tongue with the aid of a vocabulary list. It can be argued that if overused, this method is dry and uninteresting. However, it could also be argued that the communicative approach merely furnishes learners with a limited number of communicative phrases which may not apply to more sophisticated linguistic situations, while the grammar-translation method does give learners a skill set they can apply in many contexts, as well as providing them with clear objectives and a sense of achievement.

**Technology-enhanced language learning**

In itself, innovation is neither positive nor negative, but the teacher needs to have a clear idea about his or her goals in the classroom and how any new methods will support teaching and learning. Some exciting uses of technology can easily be incorporated into the language classroom. As Hertsch (2013: 121) observes, technology influences many aspects of our lives today, and its incorporation into the language classroom can have many benefits:

- It is appealing to a generation that grew up using smart phones and computers
- It is flexible and easy to modify for different learning environments
- It can be accessed anywhere and at any time
- It increases motivation and encourages learners to achieve
- Course management systems such as Moodle support the teacher by providing a framework

**Importance of involving the teacher**

The importance of involving and consulting with the teacher in any changes that will affect his/her classroom management cannot be overstressed. As we saw previously, there are many levels which affect change at the micro level: the cultural, the political, the administrative, the educational and the institutional. A number of factors can either help or hinder teachers’ involvement in educational change (Van den Branden 2009). First, teachers should be convinced of the relative advantages of the innovation. This happens, for example, when an educational innovation is perceived as a solution to a specific problem. Second, the innovation should be compatible with the teachers’ current educational practice. Another important factor is complexity. The innovation should not be too complex, and teachers
should be given time to try it out and experiment with the innovation in their classrooms. Innovations that can be observed in the educational practice of fellow teachers are more likely to be adopted. And finally, teachers should have a concrete idea of what the innovation entails and should perceive the innovation as feasible. It is also important to provide not just technological but pedagogical support when changes are implemented. Some technical innovations may seem interesting and potentially useful but teachers may not have the time or the knowhow to introduce them into their current teaching program.

Will it work?

One final point is the issue of practicality, time management and so on: will the innovation actually work? If a teacher is not convinced of this he or she is unlikely to want to spend much time trying to decide how to incorporate it into the classroom; alternately, if this is something that has been imposed on “from above” he or she may incorporate it unwillingly and as infrequently as possible. A proposed change has to be a good fit for the classroom and the teacher if it is to have any chance of success (Waters 2014). And this is where we, as teachers, come in, because we are the only ones who can truly evaluate what is on offer and assess firstly whether it will be of benefit to us and to our students, and secondly whether it will be feasible to implement this change given our individual learning and teaching environments. This is where we need to be able to sort through everything that is thrown our way, all of these enticing offers of “new and improved”, all of the demands for change coming from groups with often quite different agendas, and to decide what will be of long-lasting value in our own classrooms.

Finding a balance

It is easy to be swayed by pressures from within (I don’t want to be seen as old-fashioned/ my students seem bored and unresponsive/ I am getting stale/ there are so many new techniques I could/should be trying) and from without (implementation of a new education curriculum at government or institution level/ decisions at institution or departmental level to implement a new course management system) to implement change just for the sake of change. Yet we owe it to our students to give considered thought to any innovations we might be considering, to examine the pros and cons from all points of view: administrative, practical and pedagogical, before committing ourselves and our students to something that may be just a flash in the pan. Especially in the realm of technology, things change so fast that by the time we implement one thing the next new thing may have come along. We may need to be a bit more cautious in our classrooms, and try to find a balance between tradition, what has worked in the past and what still works, and innovation, which can often give our classes new life and energy.

References:


Foreign Language Center  
“Ignacio Manuel Altamirano”  
CALLS  
To publish in: The third issue of the CIEX JOURNAL  
“Innovation and Professional Development”

This call is addressed to: Professors - Researchers, undergraduate and graduate students from the BA in English Letters and Masters in Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics at CIEX and any academic who wish to publish research articles, essays, thesis results, didactic and pedagogical proposals; all related to the topics and sections of the journal, specified as follows:

a) Students’ & teachers’ voices: National and international research articles.
b) Updating Language Teaching Professionals: CIEX Symposums Proceedings.
c) Personal Development and Growth: Values and Culture.

The guidelines to write and present the proposals are described below:

a) Key words. - Five, in English and in Spanish.
b) Abstract (in English and in Spanish, 150 words), containing the following aspects: 
   - Introduction: describe the context where the research was carried out, reason why the topic was selected, importance of the study, reason why the research was carried out.
   - Purpose: state and explain the research objectives, intentions, questions or hypothesis.
   - Method: mention and justify the research method that was selected, describe briefly the subjects, the context and the research procedures, as well as the instruments that were used for the data and information collection.
   - Product: present the main findings, the degree to which the research objectives were reached and the answers to the research questions. Conclusion: suggest the importance of the findings, considering the contribution to the theory, the research area and professional practice. Suggest practical uses as well as possible applications for further research.
c) Introduction: present the research topic area, studied theme and the research study it is: descriptive, explaining, evaluative, correlational, interpretative, ethnographic, etc. Also, emphasize the research problem.
d) Literature review: present the main terms, concepts, and theoretical claims, analyzing and discussing the ideas presented by the main authors who have studied the topics related to the research or study presented.
e) Research methodology: describe the design features (case study, longitudinal research, transversal research, experimental research, cuasi-experimental research, etc.) Data type (describe and justify the data base, or universe, or sample, etc.) Subjects (characterize the participants in the research). Context (describe the geographic and the institutional context where the research was carried out). Instruments (describe the research instruments used to collect information and data). Data analysis methods (describe and justify the quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods).
f) Main findings and conclusions.
g) Main research strengths (related to the originality of the findings, contribution to the knowledge about a certain topic, or some other findings which contribute to the existing ones).
h) Main limitations of the study (related to the geographical or institutional context or knowledge area where the conclusions or suggestions could be applicable).
i) Main applications and impact of the research.

TOPICS FOR THE ARTICLES:
1. Learning and teaching processes.
2. Professional competences development.
3. Teaching methodology using constructivist principles.
4. Curriculum design, design of language programs or language teaching materials.
5. Language learning evaluation.
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FORMAT:
  Title using arial font, size14
  Text using arial font, size 12
  Margins: top 2.5, bottom 2.5, left 2.5, right 2.5.
  Spaces: 1.5
  No indented paragraphs
LENGTH OF THE ARTICLES:
- 8 to 10 pages containing text (from 7000 to 9000 words approximately)
- 1-2 pages containing references (using the American Psychological Association APA format)

LANGUAGES:
- The articles can be written in English, French, German, or Spanish.

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CONVOCA

A los aspirantes interesados en cursar la Licenciatura en Letras Inglesas ó la Maestría en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada; a participar en el Concurso de Selección para el ingreso al Ciclo Escolar 2016-2017, presentando el examen de admisión que se realizará del 16 de enero al 13 de agosto de 2016, conforme a los siguientes:

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