

TEACHING LANGUAGE IN THE POSTMODERN CLASSROOM

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Introduction: Interpreting the Postmodern Condition

This paper takes up the perspectives on the postmodern condition as presented by Sarah Mann in the present volume (Mann, 1999). From these perspectives, it addresses four questions:

- a. What might be the essential characteristics of a postmodern language pedagogy?
- b. What would be the essential features of the postmodern language classroom?
- c. What are the roles of the teacher in such a classroom?
- d. What are the roles of the learners in such a classroom?

In suggesting possible answers to these questions, I do not wish to convey the impression that a postmodern perspective applied to language teaching is itself without inherent problems and paradoxes. It can not provide the "ideal" prescriptions for all language pedagogy any more than could the general principles that are proposed by, for example, communicative language teaching or autonomous language learning. A postmodern perspective, like all permutations of ideas which we might relate to the management of the teaching-learning process in the classroom, is something to test against our own experiences, current classroom practices, the situations in which we teach and, crucially, its likely effects upon the progress of our learners.

A postmodern pedagogy is something of a misnomer in any case. A postmodern perspective does not resemble a set of pedagogic principles like the communicative approach to language teaching. In essence, postmodern thinking is not concerned with prescriptions for how we may act. It is more a coming together of diverse ideas which seek to interpret the human condition towards the end of the 20th century. In this sense, the present paper is an interpretation for pedagogy of an interpretation of how we live! It is therefore

a contentious and possibly inappropriate undertaking. It is also somewhat grandiose for me to try to synthesise a range of highly complex ideas in order to distil some basic proposals for the teaching of a language.

However, I believe it is worth *trying* for three reasons. First, some of the ideas that may be derived from a postmodern perspective will have a familiar ring to colleagues who have evolved notions of autonomous language learning from their earlier work in the context of communicative developments in language teaching. Our own efforts at innovation at the present time must, if postmodern theories are correct, directly reflect our own personal and professional experiences in the postmodern condition. Second, a postmodern perspective offers not only revealing interpretations of the circumstances in which we are supposed to be living, but serious challenges to some of our assumptions about particular approaches to education in general and to language teaching in particular which we may see as "progressive", or "humanistic", or "learner-centred". In other words, a postmodern perspective provides us with a critical stance that can enable us to re-evaluate recent innovations in language teaching with which we may identify.

A third reason for trying to distil ideas for language teaching from such a perspective is that it may suggest new directions we might take in our work. Our students are the young generation of the postmodern era and perhaps they are likely to be even more alert to the felt conditions of postmodern life than we can be. A key feature of these conditions (as we are constantly assured!) is uncertainty. The ways in which we enable students to learn a new language in order to gain access to other people, other cultures, and other ways of seeing needs to be sensitive to their immediate experience of a world of fragmenting structures and identities, rapid changes, and the struggle for a sense of relative equilibrium that such circumstances require. This is, of course, a highly significant demand upon any pedagogy! However, we can begin to explore postmodern ideas so that these can inform our planning and implementation of the most beneficial ways of working in the classroom which can address the interests and hopes of our students in the coming time.

This paper relates closely to the concepts and ideas explored by Sarah Mann in her paper (*op cit.*) and considers what such ideas imply for language education. The deductions I offer for pedagogy have also been influenced by the writings of Aronowitz & Giroux (1991), Gore (1993) and Usher & Edwards (1994). Before addressing the four main questions which were introduced at the start of the paper, I need to briefly contextualise these with reference to major critiques which such writers offer concerning education in the postmodern condition. I will also briefly summarise what appear to be the major shifts from the modern to the postmodern which are likely to have a direct impact upon education and, therefore, how we might locate a postmodern pedagogy within the overall educational process.

The Process of Education from a Postmodern Perspective

The current educational process, because it is a major socialising institution and a crucial location for the transmission of largely modernist values and views of reality, receives a bad press in much postmodern thinking. We are reminded that schools and universities, through their institutional discourse, sustain and perpetuate the world view, values and interests (or hegemony) of those who happen to be the rich and powerful at the time. Educational discourse, its meanings, the ways language is used, and the conventional ways of behaving which are sustained by language, constructs particular versions of the "normal", "natural", "common sense", and "inevitable". In essence, it constructs knowledge, it constructs what a teacher is or should be, and it constructs what a student or learner should be. Through such discourse, citizens are also constructed. And these constructions serve the hegemony of the dominant elite in a society. Therefore, education can be seen to significantly contribute to the social selection of members of society and, thereby, justify and maintain inequality between them as if such inequality was inevitable or "natural".

A major device within the discourse of education which contributes to the seeming inevitability of inequality of opportunity and access is the assessment process and, crucially, the criteria used to assess students. Assessment provides both gateway and barrier to the kind of knowledge that can provide its bearer with power. Assessment also defines the worth of the person being assessed both to that person and to the public, thereby positioning each individual in direct relation to other individuals. Through the discursive practices of assessment, educational "success" and "failure" are affirmed and naturalised, thereby channelling young people's eventual access to different life chances.

A postmodern perspective proposes that the dominant values within education at the present time directly mirror the preoccupations of corporate and global capitalism. Thus, the eventual contribution of the young student to the economic well-being of society is the key criterion of effective schooling. Education is being reconstituted - as it was in the 19th century as the servant of the industrial revolution - as essentially utilitarian or instrumental and students are valued for what they can do in an "efficient" or "skilful" way. What the student gains as the outcomes or products from learning are seen as far more important than the felt experience of the process.

As compared to even a decade ago, more students accept the view that the main purpose of going to university is to study something that will provide them with a better chance of getting a job on graduation. And it is becoming

commonplace (again!) for politicians to make a direct causal relationship between schooling and the economic growth of the nation and failure at school, not least in literacy, is constructed as the root of the apparent unemployability of large numbers of young people. Such assumptions justify increasing intervention of government in the curricula and standards of assessment to be used in state school systems. In sum, as "performity", in Lyotard's terms, is the most important attribute of the citizen in the economic rationalist state, so also a student's attainment during schooling of a repertoire of skills or competencies or approved "intellectual capital" is the key criterion of educational "success".

This apparent shift from liberal, democratic, or humanist definitions of education as being concerned with values and the pursuit of "truth" to a concern with capabilities and the pursuit of efficiency is merely one manifestation of the transition from modernism to the present postmodern condition. In a sense, such a shift may be seen as a reaction *against* liberal, democratic or humanist agendas not least because they appear to have failed, as all single grand theories will, in informing human beings how to make a better world. (Such a failure is palpable at the close of the most mutually destructive century in human history.) It may also be seen as the expression of the disillusionment of members of a society - both the powerful *and* the powerless - in being able to mobilise liberalism, democracy, or humanism to their own benefit.

Embracing Uncertainty

What other shifts are claimed to exemplify the postmodern condition which might also have a bearing upon our work as teachers? Sarah Mann's paper (*op cit.*) detailed the significant questioning of the nature of scientific and rational constructions of knowledge or "truth". Such rationality, seen by feminist theory in particular as extensions of patriarchal power, is replaced with the possibility of diverse "truths", alternative interpretations of the same "text" or phenomena or experiences, and a multiplicity of different but equally valid voices or positions. In essence, multivocality replaces grand theory. No longer is it the case that liberalism, for example, is more "correct" than nationalism. The question is no longer relevant when placed in the context of who has or does not have power. Recent history confirms, so the argument goes, that the grand theory we are expected to adhere to derives from the vested interests of the powerful and, just as we may identify ourselves with the theory, we also identify ourselves with such interests. If we do not, as the powerless may not, we struggle to replace it with our own "truth". Here is one of the many paradoxes of the postmodern condition. At a time when global capital is having the greatest impact on the lives of most people, the old certainties that provided industrialisation and capitalism with their rationale are no longer convincing.

The postmodern condition is therefore a moment in our history when alternative theories or voices are grappling for space and - recognising the feminist movement as the prime example - the powerless in society are struggling to have a voice.

In addition to the shift from values to performativity and from grand theory to multivocality, there is the fragmentation of modernist monolithic systems. The former Soviet Union and eastern Europe is the often quoted example at the political structure level. Within states, as in the United Kingdom, the current growth of disillusionment with intrusive centralised government is leading towards wider devolution and the renaissance of local politics. The breakdown of formerly huge manufacturing companies and the "downsizing" of business and public sector organisations have had an impact, in turn, upon the demography and character of large cities and towns and, not least, upon the working lives of the people formerly a part of such organisations. These fragmenting shifts can be traced in changes in family structures and relationships, in workplace practices, and in educational institutions. In the latter, for example, responsibility for budgets and management and for acceptable performance standards are being devolved directly to schools, departments, and individuals.

Again, these shifts are paradoxical because they coincide with the determined efforts of the powerful to maintain control through a raft of seemingly "democratic" devices such as shared worker responsibility ("quality circles"), accountability, performance management, and so on. Working relationships which emerge out of the fragmentation of large organisations coincides with more subtle forms of surveillance and control! The crucial outcome of such fragmentation, however, is that we may no longer define ourselves as members of relatively stable organisations and institutions, but as having a whole range of membership identities which are both more local and constantly changing. Some postmodern thinkers assert the notion that the human condition at the present time is one of fragmented or multiple identities. For the individual, the paradoxical results are insecurity and uncertainty coinciding with potential flexibility and inventiveness.

A fourth major shift relates to the loss of the old certainties expressed through modernist science, religion, and cultural values. Reality may now be seen to be a relative concept; it is in the eye of the beholder. If there are alternative interpretations of reality, alternative realities become more possible. And the current rapid evolution of technology is redefining what it means to be literate, to do work and where to do it, to communicate, and to have access to the world. Multi-media appears to have replaced our direct psycho-physical experience of things with simulations of them to an extent and degree that our contact with people, events, and things is now reconstituted into indirect and selectively structured forms of access. The boundary between actual contact and

simulated contact is being constantly eroded so that we find it hard to experience *anything* without associating it with some mediated experience through technology and machines.

This shift to simulated alternatives of reality or, simply, to alternative "realities", is related to the fifth and final example of the postmodern condition to which I will refer. If grand theory has failed us and, therefore, is to be mistrusted, alternative and diverse ways of thinking and acting become entirely acceptable, indeed preferable! Divergency, lateral thinking, creativity, and seeming anarchy are justifiable. In a word, mere theorising can be replaced by play. And the criteria that should guide the appropriateness of how we play - in our thinking and actions - reside in our feelings. One characteristic of the feminist critique is that patriarchal rationalism typically repressed the emotional and, if we had been guided less by such repression, the 20th century would never have been the tragic mess it turned out to be.

To sum up so far, a postmodern perspective on education reveals its essentially oppressive nature in terms of the social control it exercises upon the individual and the subsequent life chances it determines. Such control serves the values and interests of the rich and powerful. This is the case even if the discourse of education is framed as if it was emancipatory. In fact, the more assertively emancipatory the discourse and the discourse practices of education, the more opaque and subtle the oppression. The current pedagogy of "learner-centredness", for example, is little more than a collection of devices for learner self-oppression based upon inappropriate and superficial interpretations of contemporary counselling and psychotherapy practice.

The postmodern condition, as we have seen, exemplifies five key shifts that may have an impact upon classroom pedagogy. The shifts are: from values to performativity, from grand theory to multivocality, from membership of stable organisations to multiple "identities", from reality to simulated "realities", and from theory and thinking to play and feeling. All these shifts are closely related, of course. And all of them can be seen as reactions against the modern. But the modern still intrudes in those aspects of our lives in which the hegemony of the rich and powerful still exercises control in more and more subtle ways. (For the world's powerless and dispossessed, however, such control persists as palpable and unsubtle.) The postmodern condition is therefore one of inherent paradoxes and a constant tension between seeming contradictions. Fundamentally, from a postmodern perspective, oppression and emancipation may be seen as two sides of the same coin within institutions, social relations, and ways of being. In education, just as the seemingly oppressive forms control and careful structuring of the learning process may be supported by some as enabling students to be ultimately free and autonomous beings, the opposing position expressed as a determination to emancipate learners through *their* sharing of control and structuring of learning may actually entail indirect forms of oppression.

Postmodern Pedagogies and Postmodern Classrooms

True to my own postmodern condition, it is now my turn to play in the realm of implications! My intention here is to interpret these interpretations of our present condition and try to imagine what a postmodern pedagogy might look like as "played out" in a postmodern classroom. The suggestions that follow are not offered in a particular order of priority. (In this relative world, my order of priority may differ from yours in any case!)

The first thing to say, of course, is that there is no such thing as a postmodern pedagogy or the postmodern classroom. Language classrooms in the postmodern world will be more and more diverse. Acknowledging inevitable diversity, they will also be typified by an assertion of their inherent pluralism and the need for genuine inclusivity. One classroom culture, as it evolves, will be different from another classroom culture. (On the specific characteristics of the culture of a classroom, see Breen (1985)). Working with, the pluralistic and inclusive nature of the classroom community significantly extends our former involvement - and occasional frustrations - with "mixed-ability" or "multi-level" learners in the same class. The pluralism of learners' own familial, cultural and linguistic identities become resources to be *explicitly* valued and mined. The particularities of their experiences, attitudes and points of view - as compared, of course, with the obvious "good sense" and "taken for granted" of our own! - become the very focus and springboard of both the content and procedures of lessons. The curriculum and how we work together upon it becomes inclusive of the identities, interests and preferences of every learner in the room. The struggle for inclusivity entails cultural action for multicultural understandings.

In order to grapple with the implicit and explicit negotiations that pluralism and inclusivity must entail, the classroom group needs to be a dynamic self-organising learning community. It becomes the site for a struggle for encouraging and sometimes the harmonising of different voices. Achieving agreed common purposes alongside individual learning agendas in order to support them is one of the major advantages of working as a community. Such a struggle entails confronting, in explicit ways, the on-going tensions between the group and the individual which involve a the constant working out and refiguring who and what is more or less powerful and the potential oppression and/or emancipation involved. The classroom is therefore a site for the continual striving towards a radical democracy or, more precisely perhaps, a collaborating and problem-solving collection of people in which I am acting both for my own learning and for that of others and for the (hopefully) supportive culture of the classroom group.

A postmodern pedagogy locates experience as a core starting point and constant focus of attention. Classroom work builds directly upon learner and teacher experiences. The focus is on doing things, upon action, and interpreting the experiences of, and outcomes from action. The classroom process encourages alternative (re)interpretations of experiences. This reflective process serves to inform conceptualisations or clusters of different deductions so that present and future experiences can be better anticipated and guided. Experiences are things to be constructed and re-constructed and the classroom may be seen to be an ideal laboratory for the recollection, simulation, and the study of experiences. It is a place where new ways of acting can be tried out in a context of supportive feedback. Clearly, the experiences of learning and using one's first language, of grappling with a new language, of understanding other cultures and of exploring what it means to become a member of another culture are all highly relevant experiences for the language classroom. However, this pivotal focus upon linguistic and cultural experience will be located in the contexts of broader experiences in other aspects of the teacher's and the learners' lives.

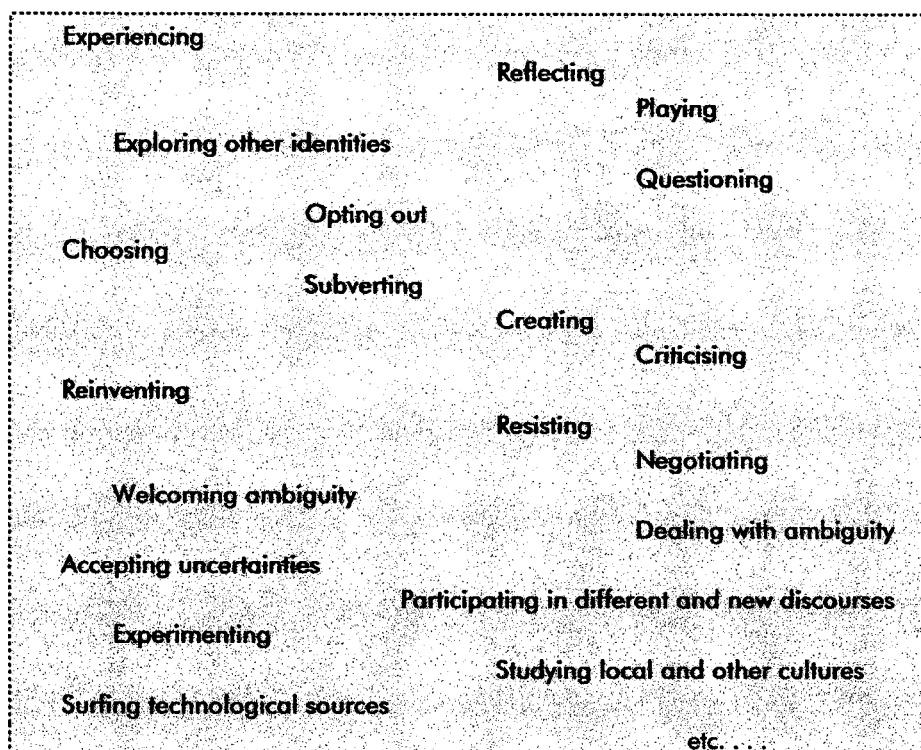
The discourse of a classroom is its languages, how they are used, how the culture of the classroom and its members are constructed and maintained by languages, and how discursive practices outside the classroom permeate these processes. Postmodern classroom discourse would need to be different from those characteristics of classroom discourse which we know from research and with which we are all too familiar. Instead of being orchestrated by the teacher to resemble a reasonably well structured dialogue or piece of music, the discourse of the postmodern classroom is more likely to resemble several simultaneous conversations or individual or small group compositions of spontaneous and seemingly discordant jazz, occasionally punctuated by agreed moments of collective harmony. In other words, classrooms are a place where discourse can be experimented with; where discourse can be inventive, creative, or unlike discourse anywhere else. And such discursal play builds upon the close observation and analysis of texts and discourse outside the classroom in other settings and communities.

The language classroom becomes a location in which established conventions governing texts and discourse are critically evaluated and new conventions explored. Through such discursal play, the classroom enables multi-vocality and multi-literacy. The process of discovering the conventions governing the form and use of a new language coincides with the supportive experience of discovering and taking on new identities and new ways of being *through* alternative language forms and uses, including those of the learner's first language.

The classroom, though immediately situated within the institution of schooling or university, will also directly reflect and call upon, in its content and

ways of working, the communal locality and culture wherein it is geographically placed. In similar ways, the boundaries between the language class and classes devoted to the study of other subjects will be weak. The boundaries between people in the room will also be weak and different role identities and what these entail for social relationships will be explored. And the spaces and the time allocated for activities will constantly change and become fluid. In essence, possible alternative relationships between things and people will be sought out and experienced. In such a context, access to what counts as knowledge and its construction and reconstruction is likely to be rendered almost infinite because of the availability of technology. The language classroom ceases to be the place where knowledge of language is made available by teacher and materials for learners and it becomes the place from which knowledge of language and its use is sought by teacher and learners together; the classroom walls become its windows.

To summarise, the pedagogy of the language classroom becomes the site for:



If all this appears to place exceptional demands upon a language classroom and, particularly, the teacher within it, a postmodern response might be to ask what the various purposes a language classroom is *intended* to serve in our society? If we see the language classroom as the location wherein learners are really expected to discover a new language and how to use it effectively within those realms of discourse inhabited by its speakers, then *how else* could a language classroom function than in the ways here proposed? However, this argument may be dismissed as far too playful! It is time we tried to reduce (or add to) the uncertainty by considering the roles of the teacher and the learners in such an environment.

The Teacher with a Different Voice

The way we speak as teachers, the ways in which we use language, and the ways in which we construct and sustain our realities, our social behaviour and identities through language will reflect the social structures in which we participate. Educational institutions and classrooms in the modern world have constructed our participation in particular ways. "Teacher" is not a neutral concept; it carries for us a number of imperatives. We can compare these in turn with the reconstructions (?) of the postmodern.

In the modern classroom, the teacher is positioned as the source and transmitter of knowledge and the bearer of the correct and appropriate forms, meanings or interpretations. If the postmodern condition questions established knowledge, proposes that alternative meanings are not only unavoidable but to be searched for, and asserts that the forms and conventions of any language are always open to change and invention, the teacher becomes the person who explicitly encourages diverse interpretations and who entices other voices to speak, and especially those of the oppressed (however we may define that term). There are no longer right answers and single meanings but provisional solutions and alternative meanings which are taken as equally valid until accepted as inadequate for the tasks in hand.

A key imperative upon the modern teacher is to assess. As we have seen, assessment is the pivotal means of control over the educational process and gateway through which access to potential power of knowledge and capability is selectively distributed. As an instrument of this assessment process, the teacher is constructed as judge and arbiter. The teacher legitimises what is acceptable as learning and acts as gatekeeper of the "right", the "correct", and the "appropriate". In this way, the teacher participates in her own oppression; to be always right, correct and appropriate and to police these things in the performance of her students. Though seemingly more demanding at first

glance, the roles of the teacher in relation to the discovery of knowledge and the refinement of capabilities in the postmodern classroom are more emancipatory for both teacher and students. Judgement is exercised, of course, but in the process of shared interpretations of possible meanings. The teacher becomes a commentator on experiences, ideas and proposals of learners. Not to assess these but to mirror them back for both confirmation of their worth and for further consideration and thought. In essence, the teacher calls upon and encourages the judgemental capacities of students so that these, in turn, may be examined and refined by them.

A prevailing image of the teacher in the modern classroom is that of manager of the teaching-learning process. Educational discourse is currently peppered with "management-speak" having been colonised by bureaucrats and politicians suffering from a myopic faith in economic rationalism and the cult of private enterprise despite clear evidence to the contrary that such endeavours are humane or, even in their own terms, economically beneficial to the wider community. Within a postmodern pedagogy, the socio-economic metaphor best describing the teacher would no longer be manager but cultural worker. This has two meanings (at least) in the context of a language classroom. The specific culture of the classroom group is gradually formed and maintained by teacher and learners working together. It is an unavoidable process which is dynamic, unpredictable, and open to change. It is a joint endeavour and any teacher's efforts to control it alone, as we know from experience, are merely wasteful and exhausting. The teacher's imperative to control - and the fear of losing it - actually inhibit the inherent spontaneity and unpredictability of the learning process of individuals and the group.

The second implication of being a cultural worker alongside learners in a classroom is that the teacher facilitates a research process resembling that of linguistic and cultural anthropology. If major functions of the postmodern classroom include a laboratory wherein discourse is analysed and evaluated and a place in which the cultural experiences of the learners and the culture of different communities are welcomed, then the teacher with the learners is a student of culture in terms of how cultures are constructed and reconstructed through languages.

In the role of manager, the teacher in the modern classroom is expected to make all the important decisions occasionally hoping to titillate learner responsibility through the device of predetermined choices. Learners therefore enter classrooms expecting to quickly discover the routines and procedures that the teacher believes to be appropriate and to slip into these without obvious complaint so that their responsibilities will not be called upon. Entering a postmodern classroom, learners are immediately confronted with key decisions to be made. The teacher will seek from learners alternative preferences in the focus and procedures of the work to be done. Such preferences will be

informed by the learners' previous experiences of learning in the particular class and elsewhere. Who will do what with whom for what purposes and for how long will be negotiated on the basis of agreed preferences or needs. As a result the larger group may well fragment into smaller working groups with an agreement to meet, share, and discuss in plenary at some future time.

The teacher facilitates in the sense of, literally, helping to make more transparent and easier the complex working process of the classroom. Facilitation is done through a range of devices such as mirroring back and reminding of key decisions, seeking clear workplans, keeping time if necessary, feeding back when requested to do so, suggesting or providing resources which learners may not know about, and by clearly identifying disagreements, different judgements, alternatives, and possible real choices. Above all, the facilitating teacher mobilises learner reflection and self-monitoring so that learners can refine their own learning agendas both individually and as a group. Assessment, formerly a means of oppression by the teacher on behalf of the modern educational process, is replaced by trust in learners' capacities to become more and more alert to their own purposes, difficulties and achievements.

Re-Learning being a Learner

Most children, before they enter school and given the basic security that shelter, food, and a loving carer can provide, are essentially postmodern learners. This claim may appear less ludicrous (playful) when we consider the finer details of the learner's role in what follows. The two main things that modern schooling teaches all of us is how we *should* learn and to *show* that we have learned particular things. In essence, our own control over our learning is taken from us through institutional and classroom procedures that breed dependency and conformity and through being the object of the assessment process. Having the opportunity in a postmodern classroom to recover control over one's own learning requires us to recover a way of acting that we last experienced in childhood and to participate in another culture. On one hand, these are possibly unanticipated and demanding requirements in the eyes of many learners who have been through the experience of schooling. On the other hand, they precisely suit learning a new language. Being a learner in a postmodern classroom, like being the teacher, is therefore potentially oppressive and emancipatory. Embracing the role is to experience a constant balancing between the two.

For learners accustomed to the modern classroom wherein following the teacher as leader, parent or Messiah has been the norm, such a personal and cultural shift will be initially confusing and seen either as very threatening or a waste of precious lesson time. A phase of loss of equilibrium is to be

expected. Hence the centrality of the focus on experience and reflection upon it in the classroom group. To compensate for and overcome such a confusing loss of equilibrium, what re-learning will be entailed in actively participating as a learner in the postmodern classroom?

Children's play is typified by absorption in the here and now and a recurrent sense of achievement. Children's learning is inherently rooted in the social. They delight in showing what they have achieved in order to receive confirmation and they will even invent invisible partners in their activity when alone. Their learning is spontaneous, intensive, timeless, and seemingly random. Children repeat and repeat and, in doing so, add variation to what appears repeated, thereby refining it. They intuitively self-monitor and reflect. They are experimental scientists who constantly test hypotheses, question, hunt for evidence and confirmation, and invent the world. They are organisms designed for learning in order to discover how best to survive and to make things manageable and pleasant in doing so. Schooling trivialises all this, exploits childrens' patience and search for approval, and tells them what they are *not* good at doing. In other words, schooling puts doubts in our minds about whether we are any good at learning in the first place. (Over 20 years ago, anticipating the postmodern perhaps, several educators identified how this happens (Holt, 1976; Illich, 1971; and the influential group of writers in Gross, 1969; among many others).)

By re-learning how to learn I do not mean that our learners could learn exactly how they did when they were children. But the classroom group can reveal some of the key features of *child-like* learning whilst calling upon learners' more mature cognitive and social capabilities in order to confront the paradoxes inherent in the postmodern condition that reverberate through the classroom. I will first suggest some of these child-like (re)learning roles and then consider other particular roles of the learner within a postmodern pedagogy.

Play being a key characteristic of a postmodern pedagogy, learners will constantly indulge in language games. I do not mean the often trivial games we find in some teaching materials which are most often put there for light relief from the "real" work. What David Crystal has called "ludic linguistics" (Crystal, 1997) involves the learner in actually breaking and re-inventing rules and conventions governing language and discourse, in looking for oddities or patterns in language which seem strange or which amuse, and in being recreative and inventive with language in its forms and uses. Such play would also involve a "fun-driven" comparing and contrasting one's first language with aspects of the new language, (re)constructing different meanings, and deliberately seeking several interpretations of the same item or text, from the mundane to the far-fetched.

Due to access to a diversity of sources, not least through technology, the child-like learner can pick and choose, reject or linger, and consolidate or

change. Personal interest and curiosity would be the basis for "surfing" a whole range of different text types and discourses across first and second languages. And collecting, comparing, classifying, and reworking examples and texts would take on the character of a personal or shared hobby.

Whilst the sharing of achievements and judgements would enable feedback and confirmation or further reflection, the learner would be at the centre of monitoring and assessing her own progress. Other members of the group and the teacher could, of course, help in this, but an unwritten rule of the classroom would be to provide explicit judgements or feedback only when asked to do so.

A major objective for learners would be to acquire new voices and new ways of articulating experiences and ideas. The culture of the classroom group would need to place high value on such diversity and multi-vocality and to assert it as a key attribute of the language class.

Such child-like learning procedures may, at first sight, appear bizarre and possibly aimless to the modern mind. However, research on how a second language is learned appears to confirm that these are the very conditions which facilitate the process. Learners' construction of interlanguages as they gradually develop a second language from the roots of their first language is typified by playful creativity, relative "rightness" and "wrongness" at any one moment, and the apparent need for the learner to (re)invent the new language on her own terms. And this process occurs largely independently of the intervention of explicit teaching, not least because different learners move at a different pace and have different preferences in how they go about the task. The essential ingredients, however, appear to be an input-rich environment, enthusiastic persistence, and the learner's search for understanding and the wish to share more and more complex meanings with supportive others. Conditions, in fact, that seem to resemble closely those of child-like language learning.

Our learners, however, are unlikely to have escaped the disempowering experience of schooling and they have to confront and deal with postmodern conditions in their daily lives. There are, therefore, additional roles which they would assume. These may be harder for older learners, but as many of our learners have grown up in the postmodern generation, perhaps we should not underestimate their familiarity with the postmodern condition and what it requires of them for survival that we "moderns" may find challenging or even unnerving.

The postmodern learner accepts that acquired knowledge and capabilities are likely to be only useful for a time because they are the means to longer term aims. Life long learning for flexibility in roles and for dealing with an uncertain future replaces the here-and-now learning focus of childhood. The postmodern learner needs the "know how" for life long

learning; the processes and strategies for learning once outside the laboratory of the classroom, independently of the teacher and the classroom group. Such a learner needs to become familiar with where to find new knowledge through new technology and how to refine capabilities in the hustle and bustle of genuine communication with others through the new language. This is not a matter of "learner training" as some proponents of autonomous learning would have us believe. Learning can not be trained, though it may be an instinct that is stifled or stolen. Reflection upon prior and on-going experiences of and from learning can help to release or restore its muscles, but learners themselves know deep down *how* to do it. It is the exercise of genuine moments of learning, simply *doing* things in order to discover something, that is the springboard of re-learning to learn.

This shaking off of the constraints of modern learning entails that the learner has to confront the postmodern emphasis upon performativity and efficiency. Postmodern learners are likely to be product-oriented, and who can blame them! In the classroom, the clear identification of goals and objectives - personal and collective - is crucial in such circumstances. And learners need to become precise in articulating for themselves and for the group their immediate and longer term needs and purposes. Clear criteria for likely "success" which, inevitably, will be provisional and shifting, need to be clarified and agreed upon and outcomes from learning tasks tested against such criteria.

The continuing struggle between involvement in the process and the attainment of goals is mirrored in the learner's need to resist and question dominant discourses - including that of the classroom group! To adopt Postman and Weingartner's phrase which they applied to teaching (1971), learning becomes itself a subversive activity. Learners have to resist the old habits of modern schooling which construct them as compliant consumers. The postmodern condition confronts them with the struggle between their own media-constructed selves as people who are inadequate *unless* they consume and the impact of over-consumption upon the well being of society and the global environment. Hence the need to question prevailing discourses and to become critically aware of their own discourse practices. In essence, a key learner role is that of a critical discourse analyst. This entails reflection on their own experiences of being positioned in certain ways through language, their own uses of language, and the realities they construct through language are the starting points for such a capability. (Concerning the nature of critical discourse analysis see, for example, Fairclough, 1992a and b; Luke 1996)

One of the more irritating features of child-like learning, even to loving parents, is the child's constant asking of questions. Learners would constantly question, look for alternative answers, and discover how to critique solutions and interpretations that do not appear to work. Rediscovering that the

learning process and its outcomes are unpredictable and that "correctness" or "rightness" are always relative, learners would accept and even seek out ambiguity. They would express their uncertainties and be willing to identify these explicitly for the sake of further exploration.

Choices and opportunities in the focus and procedures of classroom work would be regarded as learners' rights. But rights entail responsibilities. In the context of the learning community learners would have to make choices and create and take opportunities through negotiation. And these things would be valued more because they are generated through negotiation by the group rather than identified and proffered by the teacher alone.

All of these learner roles are relatively rare in the modern classroom and many learners will be unfamiliar with exercising them. Such roles may not be taken on immediately, not least because they demand that learners shed the compliance, conformity and objectivity with which they have formerly been obliged to mask their real learning for the sake of survival in the modern educational process. The classroom and the teacher have to provide the conditions in which learners recognise the purposes and value of such roles and this recognition is most likely to occur in an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence. The significance of such deeper feelings is central to a postmodern pedagogy.

In conclusion

In this paper I have tried to sketch in a tentative way what I see as the main features of a postmodern pedagogy. I have offered a rough drawing of the postmodern language classroom and the people within it and how they may act. Some of the points I have highlighted may appear very familiar to readers who have devoted much energy to the real challenges of communicative language teaching or, more recently, to autonomous language learning. It may not be too extreme to suggest that both these movements in pedagogy either anticipate or actually reflect our postmodern condition. Some of my interpretations of the possible may encourage disbelief or strong resistance. This may be due partly to our inclination to hold on to modernist assumptions about the teaching-learning process, not least its seemingly more liberal characteristics. This paper is intended to offer some alternatives to such assumptions so that, in time, more refined and viable proposals can be developed. Disbelief and resistance will also be due, no doubt justifiably, to some of the inadequacies in how I have tried to express my interpretations of often paradoxical ideas. But, as I suggested at the outset, exploring what a postmodern language pedagogy *might* look like is nevertheless worth trying

precisely because it might spark new connections and reveal new directions in language teaching.

The paper carries within it one of the central paradoxes of postmodernism. The proposals, being proposals for how we and our learners may act in the language class, may be seen as potentially emancipatory but, at the same instant, are potentially oppressive. Perhaps this is why many theorists on postmodern education resist prescription precisely because of the mistrust of any grand theories or universal "truths". None of the ideas I have proposed are "right" and all of them are provisional. They are for the taking or the leaving. Perhaps this allows me to abdicate my responsibility for what I have written? That seems to me too playful, however. It is also ahistorical in the sense of pretending that we cannot learn from past experiences. All proposals for pedagogy, be their inspiration postmodern ideas or whatever, are serious matters and have to be grounded in principles forged by experience. I do not welcome many of the aspects of the postmodern world, but I do believe that some of the ideas I have explored here have a principled heritage and might go some way to helping our learners to deal with uncertainty, both in the dynamics of the classroom process and in reclaiming control over their own learning.

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