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Post-method methodology: Principled eclecticism and its application in teaching writing to EFL exam candidates

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Abstract.
Research has shown that it is impossible to apply a rigid teaching methodology to all learners in heterogeneous classes and principled eclecticism is regarded as a successful alternative to single-method reliance or absolutism (Alharbi, 2017; Yan, Zhou & Dai, 2007; Min, 2009; Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). A principled eclectic approach is based on post-method pedagogy and eclectic teachers review, select, adapt and combine the best characteristics of mainstream methods and approaches. This paper investigates the development of popular traditional methods and approaches in the English language teaching, briefly describes their main characteristics and proposes the implementation of principled eclecticism. It draws upon Kumaravadivelu's (2003) macrostrategic framework along with the three post-method pedagogic parameters - particularity, practicality and possibility to justify how the teaching of EFL writing to exam candidates in an eclectic classroom should be designed. Lastly, it suggests that the post - method era does not imply the end of methods but to know how educators can go beyond the existing established methods and engage in the process of developing their own teaching method including the use of technology.

Keywords: parameters, macrostrategies, post-method pedagogy, principled eclecticism.
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Introduction. History of development of approaches-methods in ELT and main characteristics

It goes beyond the shadow of a doubt that there has been a preponderance of historically successive language teaching methods or a variety-based methodology. The timeline of teaching methodologies is useful as it shows how the multiple language teaching methods have enriched the ELT practices.

First in the timeline comes the *Grammar-Translation Method* (1840s-1940s) which is geared around bilingual word lists used in Latin and Greek teaching using translation. Emphasis is also given to accuracy and grammar rules are taught deductively. The next method is the *Direct Method* (1900) which is opposed to Grammar Translation monolingual reading and neglected writing skills. Other prevalent approaches are the *Oral Approach* (1930) and *Situational Language Teaching* (1960) with the PPP lesson plan (present, practice, and produce). In particular, the oral approach focuses on vocabulary and grammar and situational language teaching highlights real situations. A further method is the *Audiolingual Method* (1950s-1960s) which is centered on teaching listening and speaking before writing and reading. What follows is the *Silent Way* (1963) developed by Gattegno, underpinning the idea that teachers need to remain silent so that learners can produce much language. With the emergence of the *Competency - based Language teaching* (1970s) what is emphasized is the use of standards and ongoing assessment until mastery of the language based on measurable outcomes. Another method is the *Cooperative Language learning* (1960s-1970s) which was developed by J. Dewey and its main focus is on pair and group work, critical thinking skills in cooperative projects, problem solving and teaching of strategies. Next come the *Total Physical Response* (1970), which was developed by Dr. J. Asher, and aims at using physical activity in language teaching and the *Natural Approach* (1977), which was developed by Tracy Terrell and supported by Krashen. The most widely used approach is claimed to be the *Communicative Approach* (1980), whose main focus is on communicative competence since it is error tolerant. *Suggestopedia* (1979-1985) is another interesting approach which was developed by Lozanov. Its name is derived from suggestology which is the systematic study of the nonconscious influences. One approach also worth mentioning is the *Whole language approach* (1980s -1990s) which integrates the speaking, listening reading and writing skills in a holistic way. The *Task-Based Learning* (1980s), which was developed by Prabhu, focuses on authentic tasks and on process rather than product completion of pedagogic tasks.

Additionally, two other well known instructions are the *Text - based Instruction* supporting text deconstruction discourse analysis (social & cultural contexts) along with authentic models explicit teaching and

the *Content - based Instruction and CLIL* (1989) , developed by Brinton, Snow and Wesche, teaching organized around meaningful content subject material in English. The last theories / approaches to be considered, are the *Lexical Approach* (1990s) that highlights the centrality of multi word units-chunks, use of corpora-based activities, and data-driven learning and the *Multiple Intelligences* theory (1993), developed by Gardner, which suggests that learners have multiple intelligences, namely the visual - spatial, verbal - linguistic, musical - rhythmic, logical - mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic and bodily - kinesthetic.

What is principled eclecticism?

A variety of names has been given to the term "eclecticism" such as *Enlightened eclecticism or Informed eclecticism* (Larsen - Freeman, 2000, as cited in Alharbi, p. 35), *Disciplined eclecticism* (Rodgers, 2001, as cited in Alharbi, 2017, p. 35), names which suggest its popularity and influence. From an etymological perspective, "eclectic" comes from the Greek *eklektikos* (meaning "selective"), from the verb *eklegein*, (meaning "to select") (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary). As for its definition, it is "the blending of methods into the teacher's own method" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 352). In other words, it is a variety - based methodology since teaching via the eclectic way is a rich combination of multiple activities which shows how the combinations of language teaching methods have enriched the ELT practices.

Application of Principled Eclecticism in writing. Suggested list of the potentially most effective methods/approaches for writing

To help second language learners, the following eight methods / approaches have been selected as potentially the most effective for the implementation of principled eclecticism in the writing class and they are as follows: the communicative language teaching, the content-based instruction the whole language approach, the task - based, the text - based, the multiple intelligences theory, the competency - based and the lexical approach. The rationale of this selection is provided below along with the reference to Kumaravadivelu's (2003) macro and micro strategies in post method pedagogy.

On the contrary, some approaches/methods have been left out on the grounds that they are likely to be the least effective techniques for developing post-method writing such as the Oral / situational approach as the emphasis is on spoken rather than written language, its prescriptive nature and the use of the PPP lesson planning making learners passive recipients of knowledge. The same rationale applies to the audio lingual method because of its emphasis on spoken language and not on grammar accuracy and requirement of avoidance of errors. Similarly, the natural approach focuses on meaning rather than form. Likewise, the Silent way focuses on pronunciation charts and color coded material, suggestopedia on the unconscious state, the use of music, and relaxation prioritization, the grammar translation method on the need for translating rather than paraphrasing and the Direct Method on minimal explanations of writing.

Macro and micro strategies in post method pedagogy

Kumaravadivelou (2003) helped against the adherence to single methods in the ELT field calling for the embrace of postmethod pedagogy. Eclecticists seek the balanced development of all four skills as it is a pluralistic language teaching. The eclectic teachers can draw upon the basic parameters of a post method pedagogy that aims at transcending the limitations and incompleteness of method pedagogy and outline the macrostrategic framework of Kumaravadivelu, the pioneer of post method pedagogy. In this way, teachers may cease to be mere consumers of established methods and their inflexibility and become creators of their principled methodology. It should be accentuated that Kumaravadivelou refers to the use of principled rather than random eclecticism. Reliance on intuitive judgments needs to be sidelined by principled rather than pseudo judgments on the grounds that genuine eclecticism is done within a systematic framework.

Kumaravadivelou (2003) has suggested ten (10) macrostrategies - the what to do - and micro strategies - the how to do (Kumaravadivelou, 2003, pp. 39-40). These strategies are to be viewed as ways upon which teachers can base their choices of methods procedures to embrace post pedagogy and facilitate the implementation of principled eclecticism in the writing class. They are as follows:

Maximize learning opportunities

The first macro strategy means to prioritize learners' talk over teachers' talk and the micro strategy is technology in use (i.e., tablets) to download online articles for students to read**.** To achieve principled eclecticism the use of communicative approach is suggested as students are encouraged to discuss the given topic for brainstorming.

Facilitate negotiated interaction

In the second macro strategy pair or group work is to be ensured and the micro strategy is to develop critical thinking. For principled eclecticism the usage of a task-based approach is suggested as students cooperate for task completion.

Minimize perceptual mismatches

The third macro strategy involves avoidance focusing only on usage and prioritizing a meaning - based approach. The micro strategy is the think - aloud strategy teaching students to verbalize aloud what they think and use of learner perceptions questionnaire to identify all the sources of mismatches between teacher intention and learner interpretation at the end of the lesson. For principled eclecticism the lexical approach to contextualize words and data-driven learning for linguistic, syntactic, semantic (literal meaning of words), pragmatic (implied meaning) can be used. Figure 1 below shows the questions that are used to enable teachers to be more aware of the different types of mismatch.

Learner Perceptions

Name: Class: Date:

Please complete this questionnaire with reference to what we did in class today. Write as much as you can and give specific examples.

1. (Cognitive mismatch): I do not understand or recognize _____.
2. (Communicative mismatch): I understand _____ but I am unable to express my ideas or give an answer because I am not confident of talking in class.
3. (Linguistic mismatch): I understand _____ but I am unable to express my ideas or give an answer because I don't have enough knowledge of the language.
4. (Pedagogic mismatch): I am not clear about the main purpose of _____.
5. (Strategic mismatch): I am not clear about the overall approach I need to take in order to work on _____.
6. (Cultural mismatch): I do not have enough cultural knowledge to _____.
7. (Evaluative mismatch): I try to find out whether what I already know about _____ is correct or not.
8. (Procedural mismatch): I am not clear about what specific steps I need to follow in order to _____.
9. (Instructional mismatch): I do not understand the direction given by the teacher regarding _____.
10. (Attitudinal mismatch): I am not happy with the way the teacher did or discussed _____.

Figure 1. Learner Perceptions questionnaire (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 93)

Activate intuitive heuristics (the process of learner's self discovery)

The fourth macro strategy means to provide students with opportunities for language analysis and strategies. The micro strategy is consciousness - raising and learner's attention is caught via inductive learning. For principled eclecticism the task-based approach paired with data-driven activities (i.e., concordances) also help redrafting / revising and noticing syntactic patterns in context.

Foster language awareness

The fifth macro strategy stresses focus on form and meta - language, general and critical sociopolitical awareness. The micro strategy is explicit teaching and critical analysis of texts. Text-based instruction is proposed for principled eclecticism for its focus on text deconstruction and analysis of its organization in conjunction with CDA questions to make learners understand social power and inequalities.

Contextualize linguistic input

The sixth macro strategy refers to the reality of language as it is used in the four contexts: linguistic, extra linguistic, situational, and extra situational. The micro strategy is lexico-grammatical level activities such as prosodic signals, intended meaning and appropriacy of context. To achieve principled eclecticism the text-based instruction is recommended to use and follow the writing conventions.

Integrate language skills

The seventh macro strategy aims at ensuring that learners can react to speaking, reading, listening, and writing material. The micro strategy is to go beyond the limitations of course books that separate language skills and exploit the Internet by reading online articles which can act as prompts for listening and speaking. For principled eclecticism the potentially most effective approach would be the whole-language and task-based approach.

Promote learner autonomy

The eighth macro strategy intends to give students the opportunity to research independently. The micro strategy for teachers is to use a learner profile questionnaire to identify first the class profile. The task-based approach would be suitable for principled eclecticism. Figure 2 shown below explains how the learner profile questionnaire is used based on a Likert scale.

LEARNER PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a survey to about yourself which will help me understand what you expect to learn in the _writing class_. Please red the following statements carefully and circle 1= I agree, 2= I disagree, 3= uncertain

AIMS
- I want to improve my writing skills   1   2   3
- I want to be able to write accurately   1   2   3
- I want to improve my critical thinking skills   1   2   3
- I want to receive written corrective feedback   1   2   3
- I want to be given assessment benchmarks   1   2   3
- I want to experience writing as a process   1   2   3

STRATEGIES
- I like using strategies that help me write better   1   2   3
- I like using strategies that help me reflect on my progress   1   2   3

LEARNING STYLE
- I like working with a partner in class   1   2   3
- I like participating actively in whole-class discussions   1   2   3
- I learn best when my teacher explains writing conventions   1   2   3
- I like reading online articles to enrich my vocabulary on a topic   1   2   3

Figure 2. Learner profile questionnaire (adapted Kumaravadivelu, 2003, pp. 153-154)

Ensure social relevance

The penultimate macro strategy is to ensure that language must be relevant to learners. Prerequisite critical cultural consciousness does not only focus on the target culture. The micro strategy is to use relevant textbooks sensitive to the learners' needs local and international cultural information and a variety of cultures or cultural richness. There are two approaches to follow for principled eclecticism in this case, namely the content-based instruction with discussion activities stimulating background knowledge and sharing it and communicative language teaching.

Raise cultural consciousness

The last macro strategy suggests exchanging ideas about cultural aspects, and view both teachers and learners as cultural informants. The micro strategy is asking cultural content questions. The content - based instruction along with the theme - based model and communicative language teaching opinion activities such as national holidays, festivals, celebrations across cultures can be used as potentially effective.

The synergistic relationship of the three post method pedagogic parameters
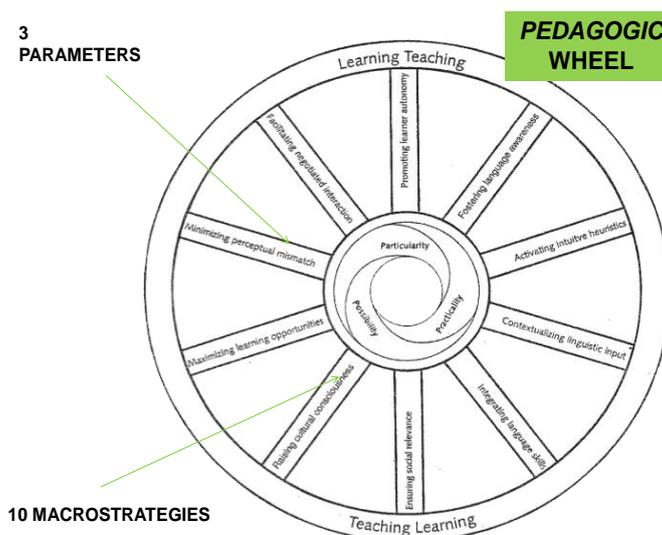

Figure 3. Kumaravadivelu's (2003) pedagogic wheel (p. 41)

The pedagogic wheel shown in Figure 3 shows how the macrostrategies and the pedagogic wheel interrelate by being in a systemic relationship. According to Kumaravadivelou (2003), there are three post method pedagogic parameters which are as follows:

Particularity

Particularity requires teachers to be context-sensitive "to a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context" (Kumaravadivelou, 2003, p. 34). It opposes to a generic set of classroom practices and superficial knowledge.

Practicality

Practicality refers to the teacher who needs to produce a personal theory of practice. In other words, it is the teachers who judge the usefulness of theories and produce "a teacher-generated theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelou, 2003, p. 35).

Possibility

This parameter "is concerned with individual identity" and states that language is shaped by the social, economic, political, and cultural context. This means a socially realistic and contextually sensitive language pedagogy (Kumaravadivelou, 2003, pp. 36-37).

Personal practical knowledge (PPK)

The personal practical knowledge could be defined as the phenomenon "when teachers are encouraged to develop their own teaching philosophy, teaching style, and instructional strategies" (Golombek, 2009, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 353).

The PPK recommended in the present article for developing principled eclecticism in writing classes, combined with the aforementioned selected teaching approaches / methods can be summarized as follows:

Lexical density and percentage- based instruction in writing skills

From a linguistic perspective, the term "lexical density" (how informative and meaningful a text is), is central to producing written texts of high quality. The potential of Web-based learning (WBL) in improving the writing performance of EFL learners in exam writing classes is enormous. Both teachers and students can get statistics and percentages on writing samples using accessible and recommended online writing content analyzers. There are also suggested simple strategies to improve percentages such as usage of combinations of parts of speech (i.e., adjective + noun, verb + adverb), pluralization, usage of gerund, addition of more lexical words in a sentence (i.e., 3 adjectives or 3 nouns one after the other), usage of complex combinations (i.e., adverb + adjective + adjective + noun) and synthesizing changes in a sentence (i.e., using pluralization plus combinations).

Critical discourse analysis questions in developing critical thinking when analyzing writing models

Examples of critical discourse analysis questions (CDA) can be as follows:

1. What is the context (social, economic, political, historical, commercial, and intellectual) in which the text was produced?

2. Who is the intended audience?

3. How true are the facts in the text, or is it purely made-up fiction or fantasy?

4. Does the text glorify the wealthy, the famous and the proud?

5. Does it lift up the powerless and those who have been pressed down?

6. Does this text make you feel contented and satisfied about the way things are right now in the world, or does it make you want to help make the world better?

7. Is this text a pleasure to read? Or, does the author use any annoying or ugly words and expressions where they are not appropriate

8. How much new did you learn from it?

Political correctness in teaching writing

Some examples of politically correct vocabulary are shown in figure 4.

Figure 4. Political Correctness in writing

people with disabilities, a person who has a disability, a person without a disability people who are blind, a person who is deaf, little person	~~the handicapped,~~ ~~the disabled~~ ~~normal, healthy~~ ~~blind, the blind~~ ~~deaf~~ ~~dwarf~~
survivor of (bullying), target of (bullying)	~~victim of,~~ ~~suffers from, bullied~~
seniors, longer living , people of the third age	~~the elderly,~~ ~~old people~~
people living below the poverty line, inactive person, person experiencing homelessness person of material wealth	~~the poor,~~ ~~the unemployed, homeless,~~ ~~the rich~~

Editor's checklist for writing

There is a plethora of questions to be asked when revising in the writing process such as "Is there any unnecessary information?", "Is vocabulary topic-related?", "Is the percentage of lexical density high (55% 65%)?", "Is the information grouped into logical paragraphs?", and "Is there too much repetition?"

Discussion-Conclusion

Considering all the above, the pedagogic implications for language teachers are the following:

a) There can be no single method of teaching writing, the "one size fits all" perspective;

b) Writing instruction should be eclectic, holistic and needs-based;

c) Language teaching has entered a new era, the post-method era and teachers should be familiar with its principles;

d) Teachers need to develop a *healthy skepticism* concerning the claims and controversies of the various methods and approaches since principled eclecticism is not unlimited liberty when mixing methodologies but provision of evidence for pedagogic choices ;

e) PPK is important for a successful exam - oriented writing class;

f) The diversified needs of learners are covered.

Figure 5 below shows a schematic representation of the eclectic writing, which shows how flexible it is.
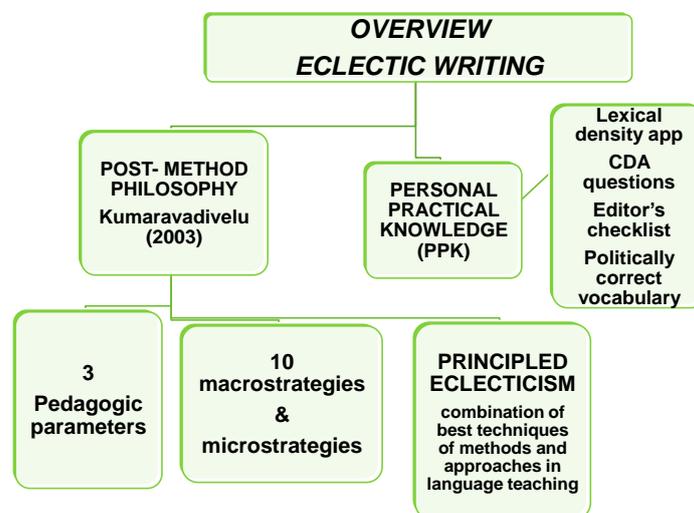
Figure 5. Representation of eclectic writing

In brief, principled eclecticism allows teachers to select what works within their own class. There is no best timeless and universal teaching method given that "the relationship between approaches, methods and teachers is complex, simply because methods do not teach: teachers do" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 358).

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