A REVIEW OF METHOD AND APPROACHES AND THEIR APPLICATIONS IN RIO DE JANEIRO STATE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to review different methods and approaches to English language teaching and indicate which presents greater viability to be applied in the public schools of the state of Rio de Janeiro, in order to provide a more meaningful learning by students. A large proportion of students feel unmotivated to study a foreign language in the regular school system and cannot learn the language significantly. It is necessary, then, to find an alternative to increase the students' interest and make foreign language teaching (English in particular) become more effective. To achieve these objectives, analyses of different methods and approaches used by most teachers in foreign language teaching were made, highlighting positive and negative aspects of each. Then, a careful examination of one of the methods is presented, the Content-Based Instruction (CBI), to understand which method analyzed would fit better the interdisciplinary approach and the contextualized teaching, guided by the minimum curriculum developed by the Rio de Janeiro State Education Department.

Keywords: CBI. Method. Rio de Janeiro State Schools. Motivation

UMA REVISÃO DO MÉTODO E DAS ABORDAGENS APLICADAS NAS ESCOLAS DO ESTADUAIS DO RIO DE JANEIRO

Resumo

O objetivo deste trabalho é fazer uma revisão dos diferentes métodos e abordagens do ensino de língua inglesa e apontar qual deles apresenta maior viabilidade de ser aplicado nas escolas públicas do estado do Rio de Janeiro, de modo a proporcionar uma aprendizagem mais significativa por parte dos alunos. Uma grande parcela dos alunos se sente desmotivada ao estudar língua estrangeira na rede de ensino regular e não consegue aprender o idioma de forma significativa. Faz-se necessário, então, encontrar uma alternativa para que o aluno se interesse e que o ensino de língua estrangeira (inglesa, em particular) se torne mais efetivo. Para atingir tais objetivos, foram feitas análises de diferentes métodos e abordagens mais utilizados

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pelos professores no ensino de língua estrangeira, destacando aspectos positivos e negativos de cada um. Em seguida, é apresentada uma análise atenta de um dos métodos, a Content Based Instruction (CBI), para entender qual dos métodos analisados melhor se ajustaria à proposta interdisciplinar e ao ensino contextualizado, orientados pelo currículo mínimo elaborado pela Secretaria de Estado de Educação do Rio de Janeiro.

Palavras-chave: CBI. Método. Escolas Estaduais do Rio de Janeiro. Motivação.

Introduction

> English language teaching in schools is currently facing serious problems. While it is compulsory in most schools, the workload for the study of English is minimal. In addition, many teachers trained in the Languages course have little or no language proficiency. This undermines the schooling of students. And in many schools English is considered of little importance, despite the highly valued knowledge of the language now days. (HODGSON, 2009, p.49)

Faced with so many problems, it is necessary to find a way to make the English language teaching more effective, since, according to Hodgson (2009) there is a great disbelief to learn English in school. It is common to hear the students say things such as "English taught in school is useless" or "Why do I have to learn English?" Teachers have to deal with unmotivated, uninterested and often undisciplined students (p.50).

Furthermore, in Brazil, the methodology adopted for teaching is almost always one that emphasizes the study of grammar. Students go through school studying the same content year after year and do not develop competence in the language. (p.50)

Therefore, a profound change in the way we teach English in schools is necessary. In order to find a method that permits the appropriate English language learning, an analysis was made of the main methods used in foreign language teaching today, highlighting their positive and negative aspects. The focus in this article is the Rio de Janeiro state school system, which has its teaching guided by a minimum curriculum.

Types of Teaching Methods

In order to determine which methods are more suitable for the minimum curriculum interdisciplinary approach and which ones allow the development of linguistic communicative competence required by the National Curriculum Parameters, it is necessary to review different methods and approaches. Methods that have some impact on the foreign language teaching nowadays were chosen.

The Grammar-Translation Method

Lindsay and Knight (2006) affirm that the grammar-translation method was developed in the 18th century as a way to teach modern languages in schools and it emerged from the way individual learners of classical languages (such as Latin and Greek) studied languages. It is basically the study of grammar rules and translation of texts from the original language into the learner's mother tongue (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006, p.16). Cestaro (2003) adds that the main goal of this method is to transmit knowledge about the language, allowing the student to develop a mastery of grammar rules. Dictionaries and grammar books were useful tools. The students had to memorize grammatical rules and examples as well as receive lengthy and exhaustive lists of vocabulary. The interaction between teacher and student was practically nonexistent and little initiative was given to the student (CESTARO, 2003, p.3).

According to Lindsay and Knight, "grammar-translation is still used to some extent in more traditional schools". As a consequence, some problems can occur: learners learn about the language, rather than how to use it; they do not have many opportunities to develop listening and speaking skills; using correct grammar is more emphasized than being able to communicate with someone; translation and the attention given to grammatical accuracy can be discouraging to some students (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006, p.16).

One advantage mentioned by the authors is that the teacher develops broad knowledge of grammatical structures and rules, which does not occur with the more modern approach called Communicative Language Teaching. The translation of texts from the target language into the mother tongue can be a great way to learn certain

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types of vocabulary and structures. A disadvantage that the method has is to limit the student's possibilities to thinking English (p.16).

The Direct Method

According to Lindsay and Knight (2006), the Direct Method was developed in the early 20th century with the intention to overcome the problems associated with grammar-translation. It introduced "the idea of lessons being conducted only in the target language". The teachers used mimes and gestures to communicate directly the meaning of words and structures, and practiced in "question-and-answer exchanges between the teacher and learners". The grammar rules were not taught to students, "but [students] worked them out for themselves"(LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006 p.16-17)

Cestaro (2003) adds that meaning was conveyed through comprehension, without ever recurring to translation. There was emphasis on oral practice. Initially, students were exposed to language facts so that, later on, they could systematize them through varied conversation exercises based on questions and answers. The exercises should follow a previously proposed model. The teacher held a central role in the learning process and the student was not given any kind of independence (CESTARO, 2003, p.4).

This method is considered an important step because it largely influences education today and turned, from the 1920s on, into a richer method called Situational Language Teaching. In this method, teaching was through situations and practice involved guided repetition, drills, dictation, and even the written assignments were based on speaking (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006 p.17).

However, in Cestaro's viewpoint, this teaching method presents some excesses, including an absolute prohibition of the use of the mother tongue in the early years of studying, not being allowed even as a resource of explanation. This caused the centralization of education in the teacher, since he or she was the unique holder of knowledge (CESTARO, 2003, p.4).

Audiolingualism

According to Lindsay and Knight, the Audiolingual approach was developed from 1950 on, at a time when it was believed that learning a language was like learning new habits. The students learned grammar not by rules, but by the response to stimuli, that is, instructions that caused the student to produce a particular type of sentence. Speaking and listening were seen as the basis of learning, being followed by reading and writing. The main characteristic of this method is the drill. Drills are exercises in which the teacher provides hints and students have to produce sentences with proper grammar structure. "Lessons often begin with dialogues", with emphasis "on the form (or structure) of language rather than on content and meaning", whereas grammatical structure is taught in a particular order. Other features include the search for correct pronunciation as a requirement from the beginning of the student's work, vocabulary limitation in the early stages of learning and the teacher's great struggle against errors (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006 p.18).

When it comes to advantages, Lindsay and Knight affirm that teachers find the drills interesting for practicing sentence patterns. But nowadays, the usefulness of drills is regarded as limited, because they do not give the learners the opportunity to interact naturally with other people. However, Cestaro states that "the teacher continued in the center of the teaching and learning process". For her, structural exercises generally irritate students and it are a discouraging factor for many of them. The biggest criticism of the method is its inability to make the student reach more advanced stages in the domain of language. This is because it is difficult to move from an automatic use of the language to its spontaneous expression (CESTARO, 2003, p.5).

Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is not really a method, but an approach. Lindsay and Knight remark that it is based on the thought that learning language means learning to communicate effectively outside the classroom. This approach emerged mainly in order to correct the limitations and errors of the previous methods. The main fault found among those was to give little or no emphasis on communication and interaction. The main goal of

CLT is communication in the target language. Some positive characteristics are: attention is given to the use and meaning of language instead of its form or content. Oral and written activities are used from the beginning through role-plays, games, etc. The teacher assumes the role of "facilitator" helping students to communicate and encouraging them to use the language. There is interaction between students in pairs or groups; and the four language skills are worked on at the same time (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006, p.20).

Still according to Lindsay and Knight, CLT is extensively used today and now the focus is on learning to communicate in the language, not on learning about the language. There are some problems with this approach and the most prominent one is that CLT "is not as effective as it claims to be", because many learners complete the course without the necessary abilities to communicate in the target language. Some other problems listed by the authors are: by emphasizing group work some students may become unmotivated; some (adults especially) may believe that it is a waste of time talking to other students on the same level as they are, finding it better to communicate with native speakers; the approach can emphasize too much speaking and listening; dividing the language up into sections like 'vocabulary', 'grammar', and 'functions' and the four skills is deceptive because an effective communication "involves using all these elements simultaneously"; and the students "do not necessarily learn what they are taught" (p.23).

Task-Based Learning

In Task-Based Learning (TBL) the focus is on the 'process' of communication. This focus is realized in giving learners tasks and according to this method, learners acquire language in an attempt to "express themselves and understand others" (LINDSAY; KNIGHT, 2006 p.23). One advantage of the Task-Based Learning is that the student can utilize the four skills simultaneously, instead of just parts of it, as sometimes happens in CLT (p.24).

On the other hand, this learning method presents a similar problem involving CLT: some learners may think they are not truly learning or being taught, and talking to another L2 learner is not as effective as talking to a native speaker (so, it is a waste of time). And the quality of the learning process may be affected by the

manner the task is performed: "the learners may avoid learning or using new language and make do with the language they have" (p.24).

All the methods discussed above have good features that can be useful for teaching foreign language in public schools. However, some of them are not feasible to be implemented in a regular classroom (e.g.: The Direct Method and Audiolingualism). Others present viability, however, do not provide required involvement learners need (e.g.: The Grammar-Translation Method). One of the methods studied drew attention because it does not present such problems and will be treated separately: CBI or Content Based Instruction.

What is CBI?

According to Stephen Davies (2003) Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is a teaching method that emphasizes learning about *content* instead of *language*. There has been a growing interest in this methodology in the last 10 years, especially in the United States and Canada, and it has proven to be a safe and effective method in ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) programs. Many teachers have found that CBI can provide classes that are entertaining and at the same time effective for their students (DAVIES, 2003, p.1).

According to Stryker and Leaver (1997) "CBI can be at once a philosophical orientation, a methodological system, a syllabus design for a single course, or a framework for an entire program of instruction. […] It represents a significant departure from traditional foreign language teaching methods" in which students achieve proficiency by taking the focus off the study of language rules and making "the study of subject matter" the core of language learning. They state that a CBI curriculum has these three fundamental characteristics: "1) [It] is based on a subject-matter core; 2) [it] uses authentic language and texts; and 3) [it] is appropriate to the needs of specific groups of students" (STRYKER; LEAVER, 1997, p.5).

For Stryker and Leaver, the fundamental organization of the curriculum focuses on the subject instead of forms, functions, situations or skills and the learning process will occur through specific topics, such as math, politics, science, culture, business and others. They underscore the importance of using materials "produced for native speakers" (authentic materials) "taken directly from the culture being

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studied". Depending on the target language, these materials can only be authentic. These can be: texts, audios, graphics, websites, visual aids and others. They emphasize the necessity of "sheltering" the texts, adapting them according to the level of proficiency of the students, even if they do not have a high level of development of language skills. Stryker and Leaver also emphasize that content must be suitable for the professional needs and personal interests of the students. A CBI curriculum must match students' needs and must be fluent and flexible (STRYKER; LEAVER, 1997, p.6-8).

Types of CBI

According to Davies (2003) there are three types of CBI: The Sheltered Model, The Adjunct Model and The Theme Based Model (DAVIES, 2003, p.1-2).

The Sheltered Model

This model is called "sheltered" because the teacher gives special assistance to the learners in order to help them understand their regular classes. Davies (2003) explains that each lesson integrates the content of a course the students are taking, which is often not a language course, and the language exploration of the content texts given. It usually involves a teacher for content and another for language. The goal of the teachers is to enable their learners to use the same material and to have the same class as the regular English L1 students (p.01).

Davies (2003) illustrates as follows: The content specialist explains the content, giving a short lecture, for instance, and then the language specialist guarantees that the students have comprehended the vocabulary. This type of model requires that the two specialists plan and evaluate the classes together (p.01).

The Adjunct Model

These classes are generally taught by an ESL teacher and its main goal is "to prepare students for 'mainstream classes'" with the L1 students. These classes "resemble EPA (English Proficiency Assessment) or ESP (English for Special

Purposes) where emphasis is placed on acquiring specific target vocabulary." (DAVIES, 2003, p.1)

Stryker and Leaver (1997) point out that the adjunct model is for students enrolled in a language course and in a content course at the same time, so there is interaction and collaboration between the language teacher and the content teacher (STRYKER; LEAVER, 1997, p.16).

The adjunct model has the purpose of enabling students to follow lessons together with students who have English as their mother tongue (YOON, 2006, p.28). They can offer "study skills sessions" to help the learners "with listening, note taking and skimming and scanning texts." These classes may be offered even before the beginning of regular classes at college (DAVIES, 2003, p.1).

The Theme Based Model

According to Davies (2003), the Theme-Based Model is generally used in EFL classes and it may be taught either solely by an EFL teacher or together with a content specialist. In this model, the teacher(s) can create activities or studies in order to arouse the interest of students, and the themes of the lessons can be extracted from a large number of topics. It is usually applied by universities which offer courses for students who do not reach the minimum requirement to enroll in a university course designed for native speakers of English. Davies describes a psychology class he team taught with a psychologist (Introduction to Psychology). They divided the class into 6 units. They had the objective of helping the students "to explore various aspects of psychology" rather than trying to give them a base in a subject that they would not understand at that stage. This example highlights one strength of theme based CBI: its flexibility, that is, the teachers can create topics especially appropriate to the needs of their students (DAVIES, 2003, p.1-2).

The Minimum Curriculum

The minimum curriculum is a document prepared by the Rio de Janeiro State Department of Education (SEEDUC). This document was drafted, analyzed and reviewed by teachers of the statewide network and conducted by professors from various universities of Rio de Janeiro. It aims to "guide, clearly and objectively, the

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items that cannot be missed in the teaching-learning process, in each subject, grade and quarter" (GOVERNO, 2012, p.2).

The document (GOVERNO, 2012) presents the skills and competences that should be worked on in the classroom for each subject in each semester and each year to ensure that there is a "common core to all" and that is in conformity with the "National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs), current laws and the reference nuances of the main national tests (p.3). It also covers the understanding of major trends and scientific theories from different areas of knowledge and education. It also covers the needs encountered by teachers in schools in a large number of situations in everyday life (p.2).

The minimum curriculum (GOVERNO, 2012) provides the student opportunities to progress at work to the next stages of the study and guarantee the education of individuals who will become capable of exercising their citizenship rights effectively. It opens the way for an interdisciplinary and contextualized educational practice, for "the inclusion of students with special needs, respect for diversity in its manifestations, the use of new media in education, the incorporation of thematic and cross-cutting projects in educational projects in schools, the offer of continuing training for teachers and other education professionals in schools, among others" (p.2).

The foreign language minimum curriculum (GOVERNO, 2012) aims to promote interdisciplinarity with students' mother tongue, so that, whenever possible, it uses the teaching by genres, the way it is done with Portuguese. But that interdisciplinary can be obtained through "themes introduced by genres". This choice is justified by the authors in the fact that in our daily life we are immersed in interaction situations, which are translated into discourse genres, whether oral or written. Its focus is in how students use their mother tongue and in variants in the foreign language that they will have contact with (p.3).

The disbelief about learning English at school (both by students and teachers in mainstream schools) is an enormous challenge in Brazilian schools. Another problem named by the author is that the credit hours for the English language are minimal and there is little knowledge of the language by teachers (WALKER *apud* Hodgson, 2003, p.49).

According to the High School PCNs (BRASIL, 2000), it is necessary for the foreign language teaching to enable students to produce and understand sentences correctly in the target language. It is also necessary that the learners achieve a level of linguistic competence that will enable them to access and process information of different types and at the same time, contribute to the construction of their citizenship. Therefore, it is meaningless to insist on language teaching that aims at metalinguistic knowledge and mastery of grammar. Such teaching is repeated year after year, containing the same content. The responsibility of learning the language has been removed from regular school and assigned to specialized courses. The teaching based on interdisciplinarily and related to real contexts requires applying certain principles; however, these principles are only theoretical because they are considered utopian or difficult to apply (BRAZIL, 2000, p.26).

It is necessary, therefore, for the high school to once again own the role of instructor in the teaching of foreign languages. In other words, it is necessary to rethink the concept of learning.

CBI and Rio de Janeiro State Schools

Stryker and Leaver (1997) affirm that the best way to gain mastery of language skills is by practicing them, not just studying or exercising their theory. They assert that many traditional schools spend a lot of time studying theory and exercises and do not give the students any autonomy to use the language in realistic situations until they achieve complete proficiency. CBI encourages students to take a more active role by using the language from the first lesson as a means of communication and providing independence and the continuation of the learning process after school (STRYKER; LEAVER, 1997, p.3).

CBI can provide this engagement, as a method that enables the use of different types of materials. CBI – precisely in the theme based model – allows the teacher to develop activities that motivate students to study the language, as Davies points out, making use of a large number of different authentic materials, including graphics, websites, music, videos, applications, and others (DAVIES, 2003, p.2). This can leave the teaching and learning process more fun and appealing to students.

CBI also has the characteristic of providing an interdisciplinary and contextualized work, which is precisely the proposal of the minimum curriculum. Using CBI, the teacher can work with texts that deal with subjects from different areas and teach the language through them. The approach also allows working with different genres, as teaching CBI occurs through content. The content can be any of the axes prescribed by the minimum curriculum as autobiographies, for example. The autobiography is the main focal point of the last quarter of high school senior classes. Through the study of autobiographies, the teacher works linguistic markers of the autobiographic genre, verbs in the past tense, time expressions and discourse markers (RIO DE JANEIRO, 2012, p.19).

After reading and analyzing a few autobiographic writings, students must prepare their own autobiography. The teacher introduces the language through content and at the same time, works the contents guided by the minimum curriculum. As CBI privileges the use of authentic materials, contact with the language will be frequent. This frequent contact is of vital importance for learning a foreign language and the development of the four language skills.

Classes are taught in the target language – in our case, English – and the student is encouraged to produce things in English in response to the content presented in the texts being studied. This can also help promote the four skills development (CRANDALL apud YOON, 2006). According to Yoon, language skills are not dissociated from the content being taught in CBI. They are all involved in all the activities (YOON, 2006, p.26).

Final Considerations

According to Hodgson (2009), the current situation of English teaching in regular schools, particularly in the public ones, is not ideal. Teachers and students face a daunting reality (HODGSON, 2009, p.49), which urges to be fixed. Based on the study of the minimum curriculum, the PCNs and the methods used in this article it is clear that the CBI method, if well executed, can achieve excellent results. By emphasizing learning through content study and not through language drilling, the method fits well the Rio de Janeiro State Minimum Curriculum, through work on

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discourse genres indicated by the document and the promotion of interdisciplinarity. The use of various materials makes learning more interesting and meaningful to many students. New studies can be done to solve problems that may arise, such as the difficulty to use authentic materials and only the English language in class without hindering the content understanding. Combining the use of diverse materials with teaching based on oral or written genres makes foreign language teaching more complete.

We need foreign language teaching to become more effective, more attractive and less repetitive. The grammar-translation method has been used for too many years in our schools and is often not effective enough. There are enough reasons to believe that CBI can be a good alternative to achieve the desired change in the foreign language teaching scenario in Brazil.

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