

PARADIGM OR MODEL: CONCEPTUAL BASIS FOR ELT?

Introduction

Language teachers are in the habit of talking of models: of teaching as well as training. A student would be taught using a certain model. A teacher would be trained on a certain model. There have been many language teaching models: the Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method etc. There are specific procedures or practices associated with them. For example the former envisaged reading and translation and formal grammar practice, the latter a priority order in presenting the skills. The necessity of a set of principles or bases for discussing learning and teaching cannot be contested. But it is increasingly apparent the term 'model' is no longer adequate for this purpose.

'Model' or 'paradigm'

According to dictionary readings a 'model' is "a representation in three dimensions of proposed structure," and/or "a person, thing proposed for imitation." "Imitation" points to the confusion. It is not difficult to see why teachers get trapped within a certain frame work. The nomenclature tends to imprison them, so that the set of practices within a method encapsulates them. The Communicative Approach which gives a degree of freedom and innovative capacity to teachers has also been turned into a fixture as a result. The PPP model envisaged by the approach has been equivalent to the rigid procedures of the Grammar Translation Method or the Audio-lingual Method. It is in this regard that Woodward's (1996) alternative term 'paradigm' borrowed from the science disciplines seems to offer more freedom in thought and action. As she herself admits, Woodward (1996) has taken the term from Kuhn (1970), who used it to define the precise realities of science teaching. According to Kuhn a paradigm is "an accepted model or pattern or a coherent tradition". It is to be noted that "model" is also subsumed within the definition. But it also offers other alternatives. Woodward elaborates the concept further. She observes that a paradigm:

- a) used a common professional language (eg. "drilling," "presentation", "eliciting")
- b) has a sharing of values (teacher's role as facilitator and not as knower)
- c) use of similar material (tape recorders, course books, task sheets)
- d) a commonality of perception (correction of errors has to be done judiciously)

It is clear that a 'concept' of a paradigm gives greater flexibility to practice. It is to be noticed that Kuhn recognizes this when he provides three alternatives. In a paradigm there is opportunity for shift and adjustment.

It could be argued that terms are not significant, it is the way they guide teachers and influence practice that is important. But terms do matter as they are associated with the conceptual framework on which teachers' found their practice. A model is very often used as a straightjacket, leading to mindless imitation. A paradigm will make them conscious of the rationale of using certain terms and the values embedded in them. In teaching, and particularly in teacher training, the conscious reflection on the paradigm should take place. For example the distinction between 'practicing' (a conscious, voluntary process) and 'drilling' (a mechanical, involuntary process) should be established. In the same way the term 'facilitator', should be clearly understood, so that the role of the teacher is clear at every stage. The facilitating role emerges from the idea of learner-centeredness which in turn is grounded on human rights and individual liberty.

Conclusion

It is clear then that Woodward's suggestion of the new terminology has relevance to ELT practice in Sri Lanka. But it is also important to reflect that one has to be cognizant of the dangers inherent in the interpretation of any terminology. Woodward argues that the greatest danger is taking things for granted. Once a paradigm (or model) has been conceptualized, there is danger in sticking to it without debating it. Whatever word one uses, there is danger in stultification and in getting fixed in one's practice. There is need for discussion and looking around to absorb new ideas and adjust practice. There is need for paradigm shift. Change has to be looked upon as inevitable. As in other professions only collegiality, sharing of ideas and the courage to innovate will bring about positive results. The importance of replacing the term 'model' with paradigm is that change could be accommodated within it.

- References :** Kuhn, T 1970 (2nd Edition). *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (Chicago University Press)
- Woodward, T 1996 "Professional Communities and Shared Paradigms" in Willis, J and D. Willis (ed) *Challenge and Change in Language Teaching* (MacMillan Heinenemann)