

classroom is highly textbook-centered. Teachers' reliance on them needs to be seriously questioned.

People in the management, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, and even students themselves may have no objection to taking it as teacher's best friend. I may also not oppose seeing it among teacher's friends, but surely I will not put it on the pedestal and cherish it as his/her best friend. For this I have many reasons. The first is that it encourages a bee-like practice in the teacher and wipes off any thinking from his/her practice. This habitual practice gets so entrenched and deep-rooted in the teacher's mind that when they give way to the developments in the field, and change, teachers fail to revise their old cherished practice. I do well remember in my school years when our textbooks kept changing because of developments in language teaching methodology, teachers were teaching new textbooks exactly in the old ways.

Name a teacher who would walk into a classroom without a textbook. Why? Simply because, I think you, and everybody else, know the answer. We have simplified teaching as pure practice. The thinking part is left for the others. You cannot walk into a classroom and perform a void pantomime. So you take the textbook with you.

Textbooks very much are like ready-made fast food: easy to buy and eat, but their taste and nutritional value: a doubtful case. Therefore, we wish to reassert here: the less reliance on the textbook brings changes in teachers' practice, and encourages them to be thinking teachers.

### Teachers' teaching 'praxis'

Teachers' teaching practice takes its early shape from their common sense,

their experience as students of foreign languages, and from the textbooks they are assigned to teach from. If they do not take part in any special teacher training activities, the possibility is that their practice grows more automatic, skilled, but less reflective and deliberate. Eventually it becomes pure labor and practice of faith. It becomes like digging in an old hole, simply because the soil is wet and soft.

At this stage teachers require an incentive to change their thinking framework. The company of colleagues, teachers' seminars, workshops, clubs; professional journals may help. Teacher's mind, his/her theoretical framework should change from faithful delivery, like a postman, of the parcel content of the textbook to the students to shaping a theoretical framework that enables him/her to alter the product to fit the user.

Teacher's classroom behavior needs to be reflective and deliberate, always having an answer to why he/she is doing what he/she is doing and allowing this theoretical framework to get influenced by classroom experience. Teachers' praxis is a conjoint and converged notion of their thinking and doing.

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This note asserts reflective use of textbooks and convergence of teaching practice with a theoretical framework, that is, 'praxis' as features of **the thinking teacher**.

education. In the case of a non-native language teacher, supposedly, a B.A. degree in the language certified that knowledge and ability.

Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, is credited for introducing a three-fold classification of areas of knowledge: practical, productive, and theoretical. The practical area of knowledge is based on purely mechanical doing. You need not question why you are doing what you are doing. Others have already done it for you. The teaching practice depicted above is a good example of that practical knowledge. We may safely generalize that most of the teaching in the classrooms is this practice. The second area of knowledge, the productive knowledge, is based on making. Crafts persons practice this kind of knowledge. It requires more than pure practical doing. Clear initial design and specific final product are part of practice. The theoretical knowledge, often contrasted with pure practical knowledge is based on 'attainment of knowledge for the sake of knowledge'. Pure mathematics is an example. You may find uses for it in the future.

The theory of teaching as taken by teachers similar to the one depicted above would be: 'Faithful delivery of the content of the textbook.' After years of practicing this theory, the teacher would internalize it as a skill and a faith. People around this teacher, that is, those responsible for his/her education and training, curriculum developers, course syllabi designers will define and safe jacket the teacher into that role: faithful performing of their instructions.

Carl Marx has noted an interesting difference between practice of bees, the architects of the Nature and that of human

architects. Bees make their marvelous structures, that is, their honeycombs based on 'practice'. Human architects make their equally marvelous structures based on 'praxis'. The ancient Greeks used the word 'praxis' to refer to a reflective, purposeful, deliberate action. Since their appearance on the surface of the earth, bees have not made changes in their practice. We have modernized, made changes in their beehives and moved them from mountains to farms. Human architects are involved in the reflective action: they constantly evaluate their ideas, designs, plans, and materials.

Is the orientation of language teachers, as the teacher depicted above, very much like the historic practice of bees: historic idea of teaching as passing the content and the ideas of the textbook to the students? How can a teacher be helped to move away from practice of bees to that of architects? Should we tell the teacher what to do or help him/her to shape a framework of thinking about pedagogy in which his/her practice would shape? I briefly make a number of suggestions here, but to attract attention to an entrenched practice and do something about it requires a more serious treatment.

**Teaching is a team work, a collaborative enterprise. A wide range of administrators, theoreticians, designers, authors, classroom practitioners get together, collaborate and decide to make it happen**

**The textbook: the teacher's best friend?**

Language teaching practice in language

Our teacher is happy that he/she has safely delivered the parcel, the content of the assigned lesson to the students.

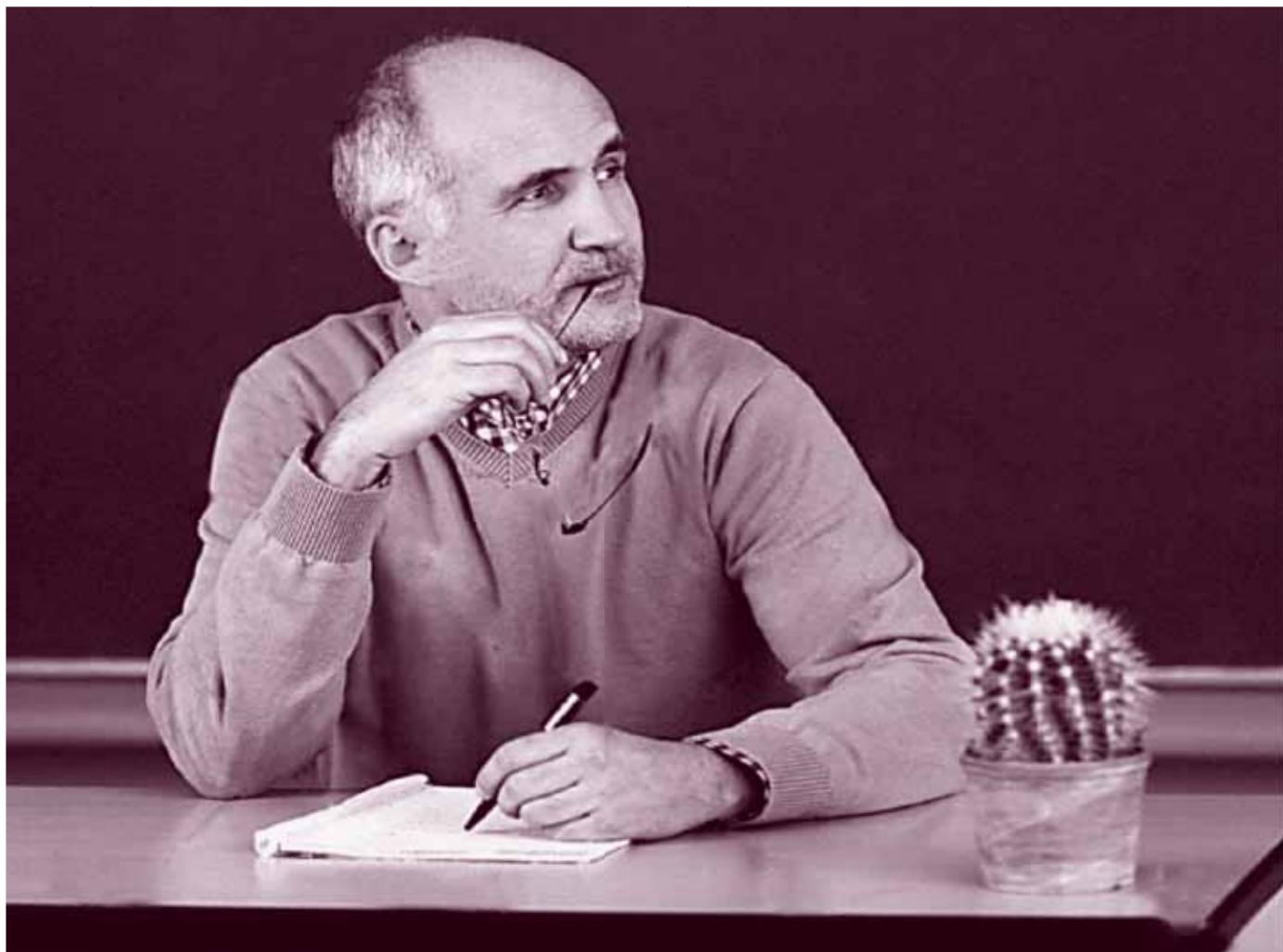
### The question of the writing:

If the above two depictions made about the teacher and the practice of teaching are true, is our teacher a postman to deliver a parcel from the Ministry of Education to the students in schools all over the country? Or is he/she a **thinking teacher**? The thinking teacher as we take it here is a teacher who already knows what is there in the parcel and directly or indirectly has participated in its shaping.

Teaching is a team work, a collaborative enterprise. A wide range of administrators, theoreticians, designers, authors, classroom practitioners get together, collaborate and decide to make it happen. A recent advertisement of an insurance company

reads: *An idea is just an idea; a plan is just a plan, until you decide to make it happen.* Teachers, classroom practitioners, are at the peak of this enterprise.

From the above description of a teacher and a performance in the classroom, though brief, it might be safely concluded that language teaching is a purely practical labor. It may require 'small' training; it does not require any expert's 'education'. Anybody who 'knows' the language can carry out that labor. In the mid twentieth century, when foreign language teaching became a world epidemic, clergies and nuns from missionaries, wives of employees in the embassies, and social workers became successful teachers of their native languages to the speakers of other languages. Most did not have any training and relevant language teaching



# The Thinking Teacher

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The Seed  
How does it know,  
this little seed,  
if it is to grow  
to a flower or weed,  
if it is to be  
a vine or shoot  
or grow into a tree  
with a long deep root?  
A seed is so small  
where do you suppose  
it stores up all  
of the things it knows?

A. Fisher

## A teacher of English as a foreign language

The stereotype teacher of English as a foreign language whom we refer to here as a sample like the majority comes into contact with the language he/she is teaching as a school subject at school and in addition holds a B.A. Degree in the language with courses in language teaching methodology, translation, and introduction to linguistics.

He/she possesses a modest repertoire of its vocabulary and grammar rules. His reading skill, specifically, reading academic texts is good. His/her use of other language skills is a doubtful case

because he has not been in the genuine language use contexts. He/she is not using the language to speak to, listen to, and write to the others regularly.

## A classroom teaching practice

The teacher, a textbook in hand, enters the classroom, rushes to the teacher's desk next to the blackboard, and sits behind it. The classroom is not equipped with any teaching aids, but a blackboard. All the teacher's teaching and the students' learning hang on the peg of a prescribed textbook.

The teacher opens the textbook, watches the class with a 'cool' look and after a fast disappearing smile starts presenting the content and the exercises of a lesson from the textbook. The teacher has presented this lesson previously many times to different classes. Out of experience, the teacher stops automatically at certain parts of the lesson, makes explanations in the students' language. Certain exercises of the lesson are done on the board; the rest are left for the students to do at home in their homework notebooks. The students' learning based on the content of the textbook is assessed in writing a few times during and at the end of the school year.

The bell is heard, the class hour is over.