Rethinking Communicative Language Teaching: Reflection and the EFL Classroom

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The contention of this paper is that many activities in the communicative language teaching (CLT) classroom discourage reflection or contemplation. The first part of this paper analyzes the prominence in CLT of phenomenalistic and intuitive activities which, with their emphases on conspicuous action and spontaneous response, suggest a proclivity to a nonreflective view of language acquisition. The second part, making use of what philosophers and psychologists have concluded about reflection, examines when, how, and why a person reflects. The last part of the paper discusses three types of CLT activities which could encourage reflection: task-oriented, process-oriented, and synthesis-oriented. The conclusion is that more activities centered around reflective thinking should be incorporated in ESL/EFL classrooms to supplement the valuable phenomenally and intuitively oriented activities.

Do ESL/EFL communicative-competence classrooms encourage activities which promote reflection? Or is there such an emphasis on overt-response interactional activities, such as role or game playing, small-group discussions, brainstorming, fast-writing, etc., that contemplation is neglected? Do such spontaneous activities tend to reward the “impulsive” student, the one who “tends to make either a quick, or gambling (impulsive), guess at an answer to a problem,” and to penalize the “reflective” student who tends “to weigh all the considerations in a problem, work out all the loopholes, then, after extensive reflection, carefully venture a solution” (Brown, 1980, pp. 93-94)?

In many classes, Underhill (1989, p. 253) writes, “conspicuous action tends to be more highly valued” than the need of “all participants to pause unilaterally and stand back from, and reflect on, what they are doing.” A conspicuous-action ESL/EFL classroom
places great emphasis on what the philosopher John Locke termed the first source of knowledge—sensation. Many of the activities arising from Total Physical Response (TPR), the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and activities designed to accommodate the affective domain, exploit the senses in promoting language acquisition. Through these activities, there is an implicit recognition that, as Locke maintains in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, a person first begins to think “when he [/she] first has any sensation” (Locke, 1706/1961, II.i.23). Conspicuous-action classrooms use the seen color, the heard sound, the felt warmth, and the smelled odor—and the physical responses to these sensations—to develop what Locke called the “simple ideas of sense” (II.ii.1). A lesson integrating several of these types of activities, Richard-Amato (1988) writes, is one in which “through the highly comprehensible input, the physical involvement, and the sensual quality of the words and action, the students become completely absorbed in the activity, making acquisition highly probable” (p. 185).

Richard-Amato (1988) offers as an illustration of integrative communicative language teaching (CLT) a series of classroom activities centered around a Mexican folktale about an imaginary bird, the pijaro-cu. In this story the bird is featherless, and its nakedness offends the king of the birds, the eagle, who threatens to send it into exile. The other birds take pity on the pijaro-cu and clothe its nakedness by contributing from their own feathers. The resultant bird sees itself as so beautiful that it becomes vain and disdainful of the other birds and finally exiles itself. The other birds go to look for the lost bird, but do not expect to find it.

One of the recommended follow-up activities to the reading of the tale is a discussion of its meaning, but most of the activities deal with reducing a reflective story to a sensual event. Students are shown pictures of colorful birds, they pantomime the movement of birds, and they role-play the different types of birds. Following a lesson in watercolor, each student is asked to paint a picture of the missing pijaro-cu. The lost imaginary bird must be found and placed in a real sensuous world of primary colors.

In such an approach, nothing can be illusive or elusive in the symbolic sense that Thoreau considered when he wrote, “I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail” (1854/1966, p. 11). In the pijaro-cu unit, activities have not been generated which explore what Locke terms the second source of knowledge, reflection, where the mind “turns its view inward upon itself and observes its own actions about those ideas [of sensation] it has [and] takes from thence other ideas” (Locke, 1706/1961, II.vi.1). Schopenhauer calls these “ideas of reflection” or
"ideas of ideas" (Vorstellungen von Vorstellungen) (Gardiner, 1973, p. 327), whereby we think about and communicate the contents of phenomenal experiences. The pájaro-cu unit activities take the phenomena of the story (the colors, the movement, the other physical actions of the birds, etc.) and recreate or reproduce them (through pictures, pantomime, music, dancing, and drawing). Absent are activities which encourage "ideas of ideas," where phenomenal experience begets conceptual realization: the nature of prejudice (the physically different bird must be exiled), kindness (the charitable contributions of the other birds), vanity (the transition of the pitiable bird to the pompous bird), irony (the bird who resented the eagle-imposed exile finally opts for self-exile), and the search for beauty or self (the birds’ futile quest for the beautiful lost pájaro-cu to which each had given a part of itself).

What we propose to do in this article is first to discuss the status of reflection as a source of knowledge in CLT. Then we will examine what is involved in reflective thinking, which will serve as a prelude to a discussion of three types of activities which we have found encourage reflection among our EFL students. (Being teachers in Saudi Arabia, we do not teach ESL students.)

DOES CLT ENCOURAGE REFLECTION?

To answer the question directly: to an extent, as our survey of CLT writers’ comments on reflection and reflective activities at the end of this section will show. However, we will begin by discussing two CLT tendencies which we feel discourage the use of reflection by promoting two other sources of knowledge—phenomenalism and intuition. Although several sources can be cited to account for these tendencies to nonreflection, the one we will concentrate on is the failure of audiolingualism, keeping in mind Savignon’s conclusion (1983) that CLT “came to be a symbol for everything that audiolingualism could not be” (p. 1).

Phenomenalism is the theory that knowledge is gained through “private sensa” (Hirst, 1973, p. 132) rather than through thought or intuition. As our analysis of the pájaro-cu activity tried to show, an emphasis on sensual apprehension as a promoter of language acquisition is prominent in some of the ways, approaches, methods, and techniques1 which have gathered, or been gathered, under the CLT umbrella:

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1 See Pennycook (1989) for a discussion of the blurring of these terms by CLT proponents and of the attempt by writers after audiolingualism “to create a myth of homogeneity” (p. 603).
2. Sensual identification: Moskowitz's (1969) affective activities, such as "I am a color" or "I am a shape"
3. Combined sensation: Lozanov's (1978) Suggestopedia or the use of music/chanting/picture activities
4. Physical response: Asher's (1982) TPR or role or game playing

While it may be argued that the above "methods" are on the periphery of CLT,² promoters of more central aspects also stress that sensually based materials promote language acquisition. Krashen and Terrell (1983, p. 32) write that a main task of the "good" CLT teacher is to provide "extra-linguistic" types of input, such as realia and pictures. Savignon (1983) recommends the inclusion of a wide range of pictorial and sound materials (songs, radio and TV programs, films, newspapers, magazines, cartoons, advertisements, illustrations) as stimulators of interaction and discussion. Celce-Murcia (1979) stresses that the senses beyond the visual and the aural should not be forgotten and suggests ways of involving the tactile, the olfactory, and the gustatory senses. Also, since L1 language acquisition studies suggest the importance of "here and now" items, there have been attempts to replicate this condition in L2 classrooms through the use of multisensory media and realia.

We believe that when classroom activities concentrate on the "sensory principle"—the term the 17th-century educator Comenius used to describe learning which proceeds through direct sensual experiencing (cited in Pennycook, p. 599)—and the "here and now," there will be less opportunity for activities involving Locke's second level of ideation, reflection, which deals with sensual reformation and the "then and there." To make a watercolor of a bird is not the same as showing that color can become an abstract, hateful concept and, like the absence of feathers, can be a basis for prejudice in more than an imaginary aviary world. A "look-and-do" classroom, "based solely on concreteness," Vygotsky (1978) writes, can have the dangerous effect of "eliminat[ing] from teaching everything associated with abstract thinking" (p. 89). Our point is not that CLT has reached this state or that the CLT curriculum has been trivialized (Mukherjee, 1986) by phenomenalistic activities, but that an excess of such sense-based activities necessarily decreases the opportunity for reflective activities.

To convey an understanding of the second nonreflection proclivity in CLT, we will begin with the most palpable failure of audiolingualism, the inability of its trainees to speak English beyond the controlled environment of the language lab. The least modification in the stimulus (a “Hiya” instead of the expected “Hello” or “Hey”) could militate against a response and forestall communicative interaction. To remedy this audiolingual failure, CLT advocates set one basic goal, variously expressed: the “creative” use of language in “a wide range of communicative situations” (Savignon, 1983, pp. 23-24), “free, spontaneous interaction” (Rivers, 1983, p. 55), “communicative confidence” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 378), etc.

Hypotheses were formulated to account for the failure of audiolingualism to reach the goal of spontaneous, creative communicative competence. Most of these involved a dichotomy, sometimes represented as a continuum:

- Krashen’s (1982) contrast between acquisition involving unconscious processes and learning involving conscious or monitored processes
- Ellis’s (1986) primary processes (those using automatic rules in unplanned discourse) and secondary processes (those using analyzed rules in planned discourse)
- Littlewood’s (1984) lower-level language operations which “unfold automatically” from “ready-made plans available in long-term memory” and higher-level operations which are “composed consciously in the light of the speaker’s immediate communicative intentions” (p. 75)

Although the validity of aspects of these hypotheses has been challenged (Ellis, 1990), the principal implication for language teaching of this dichotomizing has been to direct attention from higher-level, conscious, monitored learning, and rule-analyzing secondary processes to lower-level, unconscious acquisition, and automatic-rule primary processes. Classroom activities were designed to promote an automatic apprehension and use of the target language, that is, an intuitive grasp of the language. Intuition, as a source of knowledge, is defined as “immediate apprehension” and is sometimes called “prelinguistic knowledge” (Rorty, 1973, pp. 204-206). Manifestations of a concern for an intuitive grasp of a language are brainstorming, fast-writing, and talking-off-the-top-of-your-head activities, which in some CLT classrooms have become measurements of a student’s ability to interact and participate. Such manifestations exemplify the use of what the
German phenomenologist Husserl termed “unreflective” or “non-reflective thinking” (1962, p. 201).

Promoting an intuitive grasp of the target language, a principal achievement of CLT, however, can have an untoward consequence when the use of automatic response is encouraged in a communicative situation where time for reflection is needed. For example, in the following activity, we feel a reflective square peg is being forced into an intuitive round hole. In the activity (Richard-Amato, 1988, p. 174), students are paired up, the teacher reads the question, “If you were President of the United States, what is the first thing you would try to do?” One student must begin immediately to talk to her/his partner for “a minute or so,” answering the question. Such a question needs time for reflection. Thus it is not surprising that Richard-Amato (1988) in observing the activity noted some students “finish his or her response early” and are then allowed to use the remaining seconds to “reflect silently” (p. 174). We believe it is not just the sequence that is wrong—the time for reflection follows the attempt at producing an answer—but that such an activity encourages the promotion of a faulty learning strategy, that a complex issue can be encapsulated in a 60-second sound bite. A too-embracing insistence on the value of interaction-for-interaction’s sake forces a reflective question to yield an intuitive answer.

Just as we argued that the conspicuous-action classroom must evaluate a phenomenalistic activity (for instance, to determine whether it is more valuable to pantomime the actions of birds or to let students discuss prejudice or kindness), so we propose that the spontaneous-action classroom must evaluate the direction of an activity to decide whether it should pursue an immediate or reflective response. We believe that for certain CLT activities students should be allowed time to reflect before commencing the activity, and once in the activity they should realize that a communicative alternative is a pausing to reflect in lieu of giving a “first-idea-off-the-top-of-your-head” response. We believe the CLT presupposition that “communicative competence can be said to be an interpersonal rather than an intrapersonal trait” (Savignon, 1983, p. 8) has resulted in a plethora of activities which stress the former to the neglect of the latter. CLT intuitive activities should be complemented by those where comprehension does not spontaneously combust, where “time and space” (Underhill, 1989, p. 253) allow for a slow and gradual development, and where the learner is allowed to do some negotiating with herself/himself without being labeled as a “loner” (Rivers, 1983, p. 49)—in essence, where “learning is typified by silent reflection” (Breen & Candlin, 1979, p. 100).
This quotation from Breen and Candlin is testament of a concern in CLT with the importance of developing reflection-oriented activities. Other examples may be cited. Curran (1972) writes that students want "time to find, on their own, the required word or phrase" (p. 33) and incorporates a reflective phase in his Counselling-Learning/Community Language Learning model. When Stern (1975), Rubin (1975), and Beebe (1983) include among the characteristics of good language learners that they make calculated guesses and take reasonable risks, it is the qualifying adjectives which emphasize that a degree of reflection, not off-the-hip shooting, makes these learners successful. Other reflection-oriented activities are Carton's (1971) skill of "inferencing," Savignon's (1983) discovery learning, involving the use of deductive and inductive reasoning, and Richard-Amato's (1988) word-focus games, although the last two writers, we feel, put too much emphasis on the need for these activities to take place in a group interactional setting. Recent research on metacognitive strategy training (Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) reports on activities designed to develop learning strategies among ESL students and to promote learner consciousness of the reasoning processes. What we hope to do in a later section of this paper is to coalesce some of these ideas about the use of reflective thinking in the CLT classroom, believing that this third source of knowledge has a value as distinct as the other two, phenomenalism and intuition.

WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Before discussing the types of activities which promote reflection in EFL classrooms, we will first present a conceptualization of reflection.

When Does a Person Reflect?

Husserl says reflection arises when a person questions whether something s/he believed to exist does not exist as s/he thought, that a statement which s/he considered true is not, or that some act which s/he considered right when s/he did it might have been wrong. The transition from nonreflective to reflective thinking, Husserl believes, involves "suspending our belief in the existence" (Schmitt, 1973, p. 143) of an object or act. Psychologists (Morgan, King, Weisz, & Schopler, 1986) contend that a person reflects when confronted with a problem. Toward an ordinary situation, a person
will simply respond intuitively, but for an extraordinary one, s/he will develop "tentative notions" about the problem.

What Is Involved in Reflection?

Locke lists two general processes: integration and judgment. In the first, the ideas of sensation are gradually integrated into the unified experience of complex ideas; this process involves such faculties of the mind as discerning and distinguishing one sensory idea from another, comparing and compounding, naming, and abstracting. As to the second process, Clapp (1973) explains that for Locke, judgment "alter[s] the interpretation we make of the ideas we receive from sensation" (p. 492). For Schopenhauer, the function of reflection is essentially a practical one; it provides a means of generalizing from our observations of how things behave under varying conditions (Gardiner, 1973). For Husserl, reflection is the process by which a person knows the essential features of arbitrarily chosen examples: "Under the concept of reflection must be included all modes of immanent apprehension of the essence" (Husserl, 1962, p. 201). For psychologists (Morgan et al., 1986), reflective thinking is "the process of evaluating or testing [one's] own reasoning. Reflective thinking allows the formal-operational person to be his or her own critic, to evaluate a process, idea, or solution from the perspective of an outsider and to find errors or weak spots in it" (p. 470).

What Is the Value of Reflection?

For Locke, reflection provides us with the experience of thinking and willing, and it combines with sensation to provide us with the experiences of pleasure, pain, power, existence and unity (Clapp, 1973). For Schopenhauer, reflection allows us to put to use what we learn from experience (Gardiner, 1973). For the phenomenologists, it implements "changes of standpoint, whereby a given experience or unreflective experience-datum undergoes a certain transformation" (Husserl, 1962, p. 201). It is the only path to essentialism (Schmitt, 1973). For psychologists, reflection allows a person to take her/his first notions about a problem, test "these notions for errors," then correct them when weaknesses are found. The reflective person thus is "a powerful experimenter and problem solver" because s/he uses "the ability to think through a number of possible strategies or 'experiments' and to decide which one will yield the most information" (Morgan et al., 1986, p. 470).
Common to the answers to our questions about reflection are:

1. Reflection originates when the mind is confronted with a problem or other extraordinary situation.

2. In confronting this situation, the mind integrates such functions as defining, comparing, abstracting, generalizing, and essentiality-seeking; these processes allow the mind to make an evaluation or judgment, not just a simple intuitive response.

3. As a result, the problem has a better solution since potential weaknesses and errors have been confronted and the extraordinary situation has a richer, more essential, meaning.

A consideration of these three points about reflection, we believe, can improve the design of CLT activities and thus promote better target language acquisition. The first point establishes that most communicative situations do not need reflective thinking; an intuitive, automatic response suffices. However, certain extraordinary situations are best handled through a more deliberate, reflective approach. We believe that some CLT activities need to be examined to determine if they are encouraging students to give intuitive responses in communicative situations where the students would prefer to give a delayed, postreflection response. We need to avoid suggesting to students that unreflective uses of language are always best.

The second point establishes what mental faculties are used in reflection. We believe that at present CLT with its emphases on conspicuous action and spontaneous response has unintentionally slighted the need and desire of language learners to abstract, generalize, and synthesize. When CLT does use reflective-thinking activities, the activities tend to be task-oriented and do not allow students to expand the use of their reflective faculties by examining a metacognitive process or by synthesizing experiences.

The third point establishes that the value of reflection is personal; it brings an inner satisfaction that one has done one’s best to confront an extraordinary situation. In the language classroom, we believe that activities which allow for the use of introspection before interaction will enhance a student’s self-image because the student will have achieved a private fruition through intrapersonal testing, thereby eliminating certain first-notion responses. Consequently s/he will approach the valuable public negotiation of meaning with greater confidence. These general benefits of a greater use of reflective thinking in CLT will be expanded and particularized in the following section on types of reflective activities.
REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

Three types of reflection-centered CLT classroom activities will now be briefly discussed: (a) task-oriented, (b) process-oriented, and (c) synthesis-oriented.

Task-Oriented Activities

Task-oriented activities involving reflective thinking, the principal type presently used in CLT, lead students to discover answers for themselves. In such activities, a problem is solved, a question is answered, a conflict is resolved, a rule is formed, or a principle is exemplified. The task can involve the use of either inductive or deductive reasoning. Savignon's (1983) description of an inductive-reasoning activity in a Spanish class is typical: She gives her students some sentences related to adjective agreement and the following instructions: "Working in small groups or pairs study the above sentences. What rule can you give to explain the different forms of the adjective norteamericano?" (p. 190).

This description suggests that there are three stages in a task-oriented activity: (a) encountering the data, (b) processing it in a communal setting, and (c) producing a solution. The activity is close-ended because the emphasis is on the result, the point of eureka. We prefer a four-stage progression of our task-oriented activities, with an emphasis on the first stage:

1. Establishing need and desire. We believe that activities are best structured by first establishing student need and desire for the activity. We assume that it is difficult for one to take seriously and reflect upon activities that one has not in some way made one’s own.

2. Shaping activities through student involvement. Just as student need and desire should determine whether an activity will proceed, students should also be involved in determining how the activity will proceed. We believe that students should be given a choice of the type of activity they wish to use; for instance, whether it is to be a one-way information-gap task where students are not required to pool information in solving the problem, or a two-way information-gap task where the participants must share information to solve the problem (Ellis, 1990).

Most CLT task-oriented activities use the latter, resulting in an interpersonal group-discovery, but for most individuals the point of eureka remains a solitary, triumphant confirmation. We
believe that students should be allowed to experience both satisfaction-through-group exploration and the exhilaration of individual achievement.

3. **Hypothesis formulating.** A task-oriented activity should allow students to formulate hypotheses arising from the use of such mental functions as defining, comparing, sorting, abstracting, and evaluating. That is, times for reflection should be incorporated into the activity, allowing for reflection which both precedes and follows interaction. Interaction is valuable because one student’s hypothesizing question may direct another student to reflect over something which s/he has not considered. Thus progress is interpersonally incremental through indirect interaction, since each student must reflect on the “other-student” hypothesis and put it in the intrapersonal pattern that her/his mind is developing.

4. **Reaching a point of eureka.** Sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, the door-opening discovery is made, bringing the task to its completion. We think it preferable after discovery, even in task-oriented activities, to stress not just the *product*, but also the *process*; thus we ask students questions about the bases of their hypotheses and even compliment a student on the logic behind a hypothesis that turned out to be false.

**Process-Oriented Activities**

Process-oriented activities contrast with task-oriented activities by stressing that the value of the activity lies in the proceeding, not in the end. During each stage of the process, students should experience an indigenous, distinctive sense of accomplishment, and at the end of the process-oriented activity, the sum of these achievements should be equally distinct and greater than that experienced at any one stage. In a second way they are different from task-oriented activities: Process-oriented activities are open-ended. They close inconclusively by suggesting that (a) not every problem has a solution, and/or (b) it is not necessary to come to a common agreement about a solution, thus avoiding what Ellis (1990) finds in some interactive classrooms where students simply “go through the motion of agreeing so that they can display solidarity” (p. 116), and/or (c) each student’s individual solution has a validity in itself arising from her/his processing a personally satisfying answer.

To illustrate the distinctiveness of a process-oriented activity, we will begin by analyzing an ESL activity suggested by Francine
Schumann and described by Paulston and Bruder (1976) which might appear to be process-oriented:

Give the students a suitable Ann Landers problem with her answer removed, then send them out in the community to ask Americans what their suggested solution for the problem would be. The next time the class meets, they all compare notes and finally Landers’ answer is read. (p. 69)

This activity, which has its own special value, is structured so that there are multiple stages and ongoing subactivities suggestive of a process. However, we would classify it as a conspicuous-action, task-oriented activity because the students get a problem, are told it has an authoritative answer, formulate hypotheses about the answer through interacting with members of a community, explore further hypotheses by interacting with classmates, and then are told the authoritative answer. Such an activity, we believe, may be suggesting to students that presumably few students would be willing to accept: that all answers are in the outside world, that these answers can be found principally by negotiating with the outside world, and that the outside world has the only acceptable, definitive answers.

A reflective process-oriented activity can be contextually similar to the Ann Landers activity but would attempt to discourage such inferences. Such an activity involves three stages:

1. **Protoreflective stage.** The term *proto* is used here to mean “beginning” and “giving rise to.” A reflective process-oriented activity does not begin by “giv[ing] the students a suitable ... problem,” but by encouraging each student to examine a personal experience, the examination of which will form the basis for an activity. For example, if students were going to study a fable, from which, like the Ann Landers problem, the moral has been excised, they would be asked to recall animal narratives or personal experiences with animals. We call this stage protoreflective because the students are asked to remember something from their past involving animals as a prelude to relating that prior experience to the coming activity. They make use of memory, that “repository” where previous “perceptions” are “la[id] up” and which the mind has the power “to revive” during reflective thinking (Locke, 1706/1961, II.x.2). Also this stage is preparatory because this preliminary focusing on a personal experience accustoms each student to look inward and seek a personally satisfying experience, a proclivity which hopefully the student will carry over to the study of the central fable activity. In subsequent activities students can relate their animal stories to each other.
2. **Analytical stage.** This second stage involves more analysis than the first and brings into play inductive as well as deductive reasoning. In the fable activity, students are encouraged to see the similarities and differences in their stories. Noting that in some of their stories animals behave like people, and that some stories present “messages,” students can work out a definition of _fables_ based on their personal experience.

Copies of a fable from which the ending has been excised are then distributed. If students have understood the definition of a fable, they will quickly note that the “fable” given them is incomplete. Students will generally enjoy developing their own endings, each student developing several morals.

In this stage, students have gained a metacognitive awareness of what is involved in framing a definition; they have used such analytical faculties as comparing and contrasting, sorting information, discarding information, and generalizing.

3. **Evaluative stage.** The aim of reflective thinking is not just analytical: It is also evaluative. Through evaluation, a person will find errors or weak points, and through the elimination of such false hypotheses or misdirected analysis, s/he will get to what s/he considers to be the essential. The purpose of this stage is for students to evaluate their output.

In the evaluative stage of the fable activity, students, working alone, first eliminate all but one of their endings.

After each student has decided on one “best answer,” students work in small groups where several individual answers are reduced to one group consensus. Unlike the teacher of the Ann Landers’ activity, we do not provide an authoritative answer. This may seem to be an anticlimactic option, but our students know our style of teaching and probably anticipated our doing something like this.

We compliment the students on what they have accomplished, noting that there are not always authoritative answers to everything, but there is always the search, and they have demonstrated that they know how to search.

**Synthesis-Oriented Activities**

In his critique of the notional syllabus, Widdowson (1979) faults it for an artificial modularization which does not allow for the development of “an awareness of meaning potential.” A synthesis-oriented activity will encourage each student to realize a “meaning potential” which is hers/his alone. In such an activity, tasks are not
completed nor is process examined. Rather in synthesis-oriented activities meaning is created by each student through latensification, to use the term from photography where a latent image is intensified by chemical treatment or exposure to low light.

Synthesis means the combining of often diverse conceptions into a coherent whole. To illustrate, students in an advanced-level class watch a video compiled from English-language TV coverage of the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall. Several weeks later they read Frost’s poem “Mending Walls” (with its antinomies, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall” and “Good walls make good neighbors”). If in classroom discussion some students indicate that they see a connection between the TV coverage and the poem, they are exhibiting the reflective faculty of synthesis, although not at a very high level since there is a linguistic clue, the word “wall.” After several more weeks there is an activity comparing and contrasting astronaut-taken photographs of the earth with a classroom globe of the earth, and one or several students note that one is boundless while the other has boundaries and relate this observation to the “walls” of the two previous activities. Students are engaging in a higher level of synthesizing. Several weeks later, a visiting psychologist lectures and takes questions on forms of prejudice in society and again one or several students connect this societal barriering with the earlier physical barriers. Students are exhibiting a still higher level of synthesis.

What is crucial for the success of a synthesis-oriented activity is that the teacher avoid the following: (a) predetermining synthesis by stating what the teacher feels is its cohering basis, such as by announcing that during the semester the class will study manifestations of barriers; and (b) consciously designing activities which will dictate the direction synthesis will take. If a course has 20–25 activities, there is a synthetic basis, which each student can use in making her/his own personal synthesis. Of the three types of reflective activities, synthesis-oriented activities best allow a student to stamp her/his validating mark on the learning process.

**CONCLUSION**

Rivers (1983) writes that some teachers “take their students by routes that are circuitous, lead to deadends, backtrack, and make the going rough and difficult, so that attention is on the going instead of the destination, and students begin to feel that the journey itself is the most important thing, completely losing sight of the goal.” She prefers a class where “students never allow themselves to
become absorbed in any activity on the way as an end in itself” (p. 55).

Our preference is different. We like circumlocutions where the reflective student circles a problem like a hawk spiraling above its prey. We find, and think our students find, a fascination in the “rough and difficult.” We like backtracking, for is not that a definition of reflection? We have to like the “going” because our students might spot the “destination” we have presumptuously set without consulting them and, equally presumptuously, might decide to sidetrack us out of playful spite. And hooray for those students who “begin to feel that the journey itself is the most important thing.” Does not almost every attempt at reflection have “deadends,” inevitable and we feel valuable for ESL/EFL students?

To summarize, we have tried to show that many activities in CLT, in an attempt to correct some deficiencies of audiolingualism, show a reliance on two sources of knowledge, phenomenalism and intuition, at the expense of the third, reflection. While some CLT writers have acknowledged the importance of developing and promoting reflective thinking among ESL/EFL students, the major types of activities in the CLT spontaneous-response, conspicuous-action classroom flow from conceptions which do not encourage reflection:

1. Phenomenalistically based activities which suggest that *sensa* are crucial to language acquisition
2. Immediate-response activities which measure if subconscious, automatic, intuitive acquisition has occurred
3. Interactional activities which stress that language is acquired through an interpersonal negotiation, not through the intrapersonal negotiation where the mind reflectively “turns inward upon itself”

The point of our paper is not to deny the value of phenomenalistic, intuitive, interactional activities, but to suggest that a consideration of reflection can complement them. Particularly we have addressed the following central assumptions of CLT:

1. *The type of input.* Certainly for language acquisition to be successful, input must be comprehensible and relevant or interesting. However, we believe that many CLT activities assume that these criteria must be met at the same time and in the same way. Comprehensibility must be realized immediately or almost immediately or the student is “lost.” However, relevance or interest, typically gauged in the CLT classroom through
conspicuous action or spontaneous participation, may not be immediately apparent until the mind of the student has had the time to define, sort, and abstract from the input.

2. **The type of output.** Output which takes the forms of first-idea response, brainstorming, or fast-writing exhibits the characteristic of conspicuous immediacy. Without doubt these and other spontaneous-response activities are valuable forms of output, but not when an intuitive response is encouraged or accepted in a situation where the student realizes that s/he could produce a better response if s/he were given the time to discard some of her/his first notions. In certain communicative situations, a reflection-preceding-response sequence could possibly result in an output more indicative of the output desired by the student.

3. **A reliance on interaction.** It is true that “learning seen as totally a personal and subjective matter is seeing learning in a vacuum” (Breen & Candlin, 1979, p. 101), but we believe it is equally extremist to stress that language acquisition is totally dependent on interpersonal negotiation. We know of no major CLT theorist who maintains either ultraistic position, but we have found instances, some examined earlier in this paper, where there is an interaction-for-interaction’s sake tendency. To counteract this proclivity, we have proposed that for some activities an intra-action/interaction alternating sequence be used and that for others students have more opportunities to stand back and reflect silently.

4. **A reliance on task-oriented activities.** We believe that more process-oriented and synthesis-oriented activities will promote the developing of critical thinking and metacognitive learning strategies, encourage an individualizing of language acquisition, and instill motivation and self-esteem.

We hope that those ESL/EFL teachers who see a validity in our assessment of the spontaneous-response, conspicuous-action CLT classroom and a value in the three types of reflective activities which we have discussed will realize that the CLT classroom can be invigorated by incorporating some activities promoting reflection.
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