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A Critical History of Autonomous Language Learning: Exposing the Institutional and Structural Resistance Against Methodological Innovation in Language Education

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Abstract

In our current information societies, opportunities for innovative language teaching methodologies are plenty, yet we continue to teach languages as we did centuries ago. In this paper, I conduct a critical review of the history of language learning, the institutionalization of language education, and the information revolution in order to unveil the structural and material factors that limit methodological innovation and hinder the development of learner autonomy, critical thinking, and life-long learning. Based on this review I further argue that scarcity and the system's rational functionality are the root problem as well as the foundation of traditional language teaching. The conclusions of this paper offer a critical assessment of the possibilities as well as necessary conditions for the development of truly innovative methodologies and education reform.

Keywords: learner autonomy, self-access, language learning, self-directed learning, life-long learning

Self-access centers have for a long time provided learning materials, activities, and personalized guidance in order to help autonomous language learners develop their skills and learn how to take control over different aspects of their own language learning process. However, teachers and researchers usually take for granted the reason why this kind of support is so necessary. The reason is scarcity—as in lack of access to learning resources and adequate language learning environments—, which has for centuries limited the development of learner autonomy and has even shaped our current institutional systems of education. Let us start this analysis by exploring the crucial role of scarcity in the history of autonomous language learning.

In his book, *Deschooling Society* (1971), Ivan Illich comes to understand formal education as a state monopoly. However, influenced by economist Karl Polanyi, Illich would, later on, develop a less romantic, more historical understanding of formal education. Eventually, he came to understand education as learning “when it takes place under the assumption of scarcity in the means which produce it” (Illich, 1987, p. 12). From the point of

view of the market economy, knowledge (like any other commodity) would then be valuable only in as much as it is both highly demanded, yet in scarce supply.

In this vein, Illich argues that our belief in knowledge as a scarce asset leads us to rationalize and legitimize the institutionalization of education by the state. Whether or not we today still regard linguistic knowledge as scarce is something that I will thoroughly examine throughout this paper. However, we must start by reflecting on how the history of language education has indeed been marked by students' limited access to learning materials, native speakers, and input in their target language.

For most of human history, geography has played a key role in determining who gets to learn a foreign language. Access to the sea allowed coastal people to be "in touch with more of the outside world, (...) usually [becoming] more knowledgeable and more technologically and socially advanced than interior peoples" (Sowell, 1997, p. 13). In this sense, the challenges geography presented for transportation (and consequently the circulation of knowledge) have drastically influenced the history of language learning.

Likewise, socio-economic, and political factors have for millennia made education the prerogative of the elite and the clergy. If underprivileged learners were neither able to mingle with native speakers nor able to study languages formally with the help of a tutor, their only options were then to either get their hands on some learning materials or not learn a new language at all. Materials were exceedingly rare and consisted mainly of vernacular-Latin glossaries and conversation manuals.

However, from the sixteen and seventeen centuries onwards, socio-cultural, political, and commercial interest in modern languages would grow, and so, many authors would start writing learning materials to meet the growing demand. Yet resources remained scarce. It would not be until the beginning of the 20th century that language education would start to be institutionalized and thus made available for the masses. These were the beginnings of the professionalization of language education; private tutors thus became "teachers," a new identity that held more power and social prestige.

Even though public education has been a great advancement, fifty years ago access to language education still varied greatly by socioeconomic status. Depending on one's background, access to learning materials and native speakers was very often hard to find and rather expensive. As a result, most people—unable to pay for such privileges—relied heavily on public language education.

In sum, scarcity in terms of availability of and access to learning materials and language content has been a major obstacle for autonomous language learners throughout history. In the realm of formal education, students' objective scarcity thus became language teachers' source of power and status, for they had a de facto monopoly on language as well as its pedagogy, practice opportunities, and learning materials. It is in the context of such material constraints and teachers' ascendancy that the methodology of traditional language teaching (TLT) originated. Henceforth I will use this term to refer to the most common methodology we find in formal language education today. Let us now proceed to analyze it in detail.

A System Shaped by Scarcity

The emergence of the modern nation-state and industrialization brought about the need for countries to educate their populations. Inspired by the production model of fabrics, formal education was created to educate the masses. This type of school machined “generation after generation of young people into a pliable, regimented workforce of the type required by electromechanical technology and the assembly line” (Toffler, 1980, p. 26).

The search for efficient management of millions of new students only helped emphasize the need for methods and procedures akin to those of factories and chain production, in a process called Fordism. As scholar Rena Upitis (2004, p. 20) describes this process:

Put a homogeneous group of children in a confined space (called a classroom), process them for a year (fill them with knowledge), make sure they have learned the set and predictable curriculum (test them according to established standards), move them to the next processing container (another classroom), and continue the cycle until they have reached the age at which they are deemed ready to leave (and enter the workplace).

Although in our current information societies the economy demands autonomy, dynamism, and innovation, the industrial mass education model still constitutes the core operatory logic of the system. Likewise, Fordism still conditions our understanding and experience of education as a centralized, standardized linear transmission of knowledge. Basically, “the teacher has the knowledge, and in assembly line fashion transmits that knowledge to the students. Then students are tested as to whether they have retained the knowledge that has been presented to them” (Upitis, 2004, p. 20).

Within the factory school, exams become thus of vital importance, since these occupy the last stage of the assembly line, where the work of teachers, students, and the system as a whole is judged on the basis of students' test performance. Thus, testing becomes everyone's main concern. Teachers' job boils down to making students learn the curriculum, so they may pass their exams with good scores.

Consequently, this emphasis on high-stakes testing and mechanical instruction of the curriculum makes students prioritize short-term memorization, just as it invites them to adopt the bad habit of cramming. Nonetheless, there are many more reasons why it is particularly in students' best interest to fixate their attention on exams and their GPA. This is because, even though testing does not necessarily guarantee any real long-term learning or useful knowledge for our changing economy, testing still does indeed determine much of students' academic and professional future.

In a nutshell, this is due to the fact that under the current industrial education model, credentialism rules. According to Illich (2000), along with the creation of mass education, the newly established institutions arrogated to themselves the right to determine what kinds of knowledge are legitimate or not. This means that the knowledge and skills one may possess are only valid if recognized by the state or parallel institutions of prestige. Naturally, this leaves us in a situation where certifications (i.e., officially approved knowledge/skills) are socially and politically considered more valuable than competence or knowledge per se.

This phenomenon is explained by Michael Spence's Nobel prize-winning economic model called "the signaling model of education," which states that academic success is highly valued by employers, not because they expect workers to remember everything they studied in university, but because academic success signals key characteristics that all "good worker" must have: intelligence, conscientiousness, and sheep-like conformity, as well as a certain socio-economic status characteristic of those who can afford an education (Caplan, 2018).

Likewise, in the field of applied economics, the "sheepskin effect" is a well-studied phenomenon that shows that people who possess an academic degree earn more money than those who have the same level of education but lack the credentials to show for it (2018, p. 125). In fact, the vast literature on the topic shows that graduation years are the most valuable of all because that is when students finally earn their diplomas (2018, pp. 125–126).

As Caplan (2018, p. 125) explains, holding a graduation diploma sends a strong message that "I take social norms seriously—and have the brains and work ethic to comply". Even if you have the same competence and skill as a graduated student, dropping out sends a

very negative message to employers: “I scorn social norms—or lack the brains and work ethic to comply.” Certainly, productive docile students make productive docile workers, which is exactly what employers want, people who work hard without complaining.

Additionally, this belief that “good students make good workers” is self-reinforcing. “If you want the labor market to recognize your strengths, and most of the people who share your strengths hold a credential, you’d better earn one too” (2018, p. 36). Moreover, from an Illichian perspective, we can see that it is precisely this institutional gatekeeping that makes legitimized knowledge scarce and thus socio-economically valuable and worth pursuing.

In turn, this leads to two additional big problems: malemployment and credential inflation. Most researchers agree that malemployment—that is, working at a job that is unrelated to or below one’s level of education—is on the rise (2018, p. 132). Likewise, studies show that average education within individual occupations has been raising for decades. Since there are too many highly qualified workers, there are not enough jobs for all of them. Thus, the rest of highly qualified workers is forced to take mid-level jobs, in turn pushing other people into even lower-level jobs (Van de Werfhorst & Andersen, 2005, pp. 2–3).

The more credentials people have, the harder and longer you need to study in order to stand out and convince employers to hire you. Once again, Illich’s theory is proven right, credentials are only valuable under conditions of scarcity: if everyone had a Ph.D., having a Ph.D. would lose all its differentiating value, and become the new bare minimum employers would expect from workers.

In sum, we can see how Fordism in education accentuates the linear transmission model to such an extent that exams—as the most decisive stage in the said process—have become not just a means to an end (to evaluate students’ learning), but an end all in itself (passing exams for reasons other than its original evaluative function, like to obtain credentials and thence a job). This is, in fact, a well-studied phenomenon by sociologists, which in the terminology of Karl Mannheim is called “functional rationality”; that is

the type of rationality that prevails in an organization of human activities in which the thought, knowledge, and reflection of the participants are virtually unnecessary; men become parts of a mechanical process in which each is assigned a functional position and role. Their purposes, wishes, and values become irrelevant and superfluous in an eminently "rational" process. What they forfeit in creativity and initiative is gained by

the organization as a whole and contributes, presumably, to its greater "efficiency" (Zeitlin, 1968, pp. 311–312).

In the education system, we can then see this functional rationality in the fact that, as long as some few basic technical procedures are done successfully, the whole educational apparatus can continue functioning as usual regardless of people's alienation or the actual degree of learning and long-term retention of students, let alone the development of more abstract skills such as autonomy, critical thinking, or life-long learning. Basically, the system will always choose efficiency over moral or intellectual considerations regarding "what education should be like".

In conclusion, we can see that education does not occur in a vacuum, nor it is based on humanistic ideals of learning for the pleasure of learning or self-development. The modern educational system was, in fact, first conceived as a solution to scarcity, in terms of people needing to be provided with instruction as well as in terms of meeting the demands of the labor market. Even though our current societies are vastly different from the industrialization area, the industrial education system remains unchanged.

This means that today's formal education continues to follow the same assembly-line model that reduces education to a mechanical process of putting information into students' brains, so they can pass their exams and, as a result, they may become useful to the interest of capital. Likewise, it is this same implicit rationale and foundational motives of the system that continue today to make us think that we live in scarcity, and thus thinking that language learning is exceedingly difficult –if not impossible— to be conducted autonomously. Now, let us proceed to analyze how these structural factors have shaped the way we have come to experience language education today.

Scarcity, the System, and Traditional Language Teaching

As seen so far, the educational system was created as a solution to scarcity and inequality. Now, I will examine how scarcity, as well as these systemic structures and procedures of educational institutions, have shaped the archetypal methodology used in formal language education, which is characterized by being standardized, teacher-centered, and sharing the same tendency to make exams the end of its endeavor rather than aspire to foster learner autonomy, long-term acquisition, or life-long learning. Henceforth, I will refer to it as traditional language teaching (TLT).

TLT precedes the advent of information societies, and it is constructed around a historical notion of scarcity. By this, I mean that TLT is based on the assumption that students lack access to information and learning materials, and that (even if they had access) they are incapable to manage said information to educate themselves. From these beliefs, it then follows that language teachers are naturally expected to be students' main (if not only) language learning resource.

Likewise, since students have for centuries depended on teachers to learn languages, teachers became the monopolizers of (1) linguistic knowledge—as only they speak the language fluently—, (2) methodology—as only they know about methodology and control instruction— and (3) learning materials—as only they choose and provide what is to be studied and evaluated—. In simple words, teachers have for centuries monopolized linguistic knowledge and controlled its entire linear transmission. In this regard, we can see that teacher-centeredness is a historically and materially contingent construct, a methodology optimized for the linear transmission of information in a context of scarcity.

Consequently, teachers' job boils down to transmitting said “scarce” knowledge to students. However, this is an endeavor highly constrained by bureaucratic demands and the practicalities imposed by the assembly line. The teacher is expected to maintain control, teach a prescribed content, capture student interest in the content, match levels of instruction to differences among students, and show tangible evidence that students have performed satisfactorily (Cuban, 1986, p. 57).

The ends determine the means, and so teachers usually adapt their teaching approach so it meets all these requirements efficiently. A good example of this is how traditional teachers tend to strictly follow premade manuals. Textbooks thus become the backbone of entire language courses by providing teachers with the organized linguistic contents and premade language practice that they will teach and implement in the classroom. Admittedly, textbooks are convenient. They make instruction and evaluation standardized and mechanical, all the teacher needs to do is teach students its content, page after page, day after day.

Yet, for all its convenience, the use of textbooks also has serious drawbacks: the language content may be unauthentic and distorted; since they standardize instruction, they also disregard students' needs; they are expensive; and they deskill teachers who rely too much on them (Richards, 2001). When teachers only use textbooks, learning becomes “cumulative, successive, circular, and chronological” (Martín-Sánchez, 2022, pp. 52–53).

Of course, motivated teachers may try to complement their approach with different tools, content, or self-made materials which is good. However, considering the rational functionality of the system, we must acknowledge the fact that as long as students pass their exams, instruction can, in fact, consist of a methodology as simple as following the textbook. As noted by Philip Jackson in *The Teacher and the Machine* (1968), teachers have learned to only use the tools that make their job easier. In fact, as Cuban (1986, p. 58) further elaborates:

The tools that teachers have added to their repertoire over time (e.g., chalkboard and text-books) have been simple, durable, flexible, and responsive to teacher-defined problems in meeting the demands of daily instruction. (...) Textbooks are also versatile. The textbook easily outstrips a movie projector or televised lesson for versatility in coping with the unpredictability of classroom life.

As seen so far, the very structure of the system establishes clear means and ends (transmitting information to pass evaluations), which in turn conditions greatly the methodology language teachers are able to apply in language class. Thus, TLT naturally emerges as teachers' way to cope with the complex demands and constraints of the system. By adopting "practical classroom routines and teaching methods, teachers have survived the acute, cross-cutting daily pressures of the classroom; that is, teachers have constructed a vocabulary to match the grammar of the classroom" (Cuban, 1986, p. 58).

In this sense, TLT can be regarded as the methodology by default of the system, for it represents the minimum methodological effort necessary for the system to operate. Quality of education may vary across institutions and countries, but as long as the syllabus is imparted and students pass their exams, the system is considered to be "working." Nonetheless, not all educators limit their teaching practice to the mere fulfillment of such basic rational functionality and technical requirements.

Even if circumstances may often be adverse, there are nowadays many teachers who try to incorporate in their language classes approaches more proximate to leading-edge methodologies (project-based learning, the communicative method, etc.) as well as the use of modern technologies. Nevertheless, the incorporation of innovative approaches is yet frequently subordinated to the logic of teacher-centered, textbook-based, and exam-oriented instruction; thus, lacking any genuine capacity to bring about education reform.

In other words, innovative methodologies are often either innocuous educational fads—which are no threat to the system—or they are in fact transgressive; in which case they

will be usually adapted and assimilated by the traditional teaching model, limiting their methodological revolutionary potential, turning said approaches into mere variations on traditional ways of language teaching. For instance, in the classroom, communicative approaches (e.g., role play, debates, etc.) tend often to be more about practicing the grammar and vocabulary in the textbook than a real attempt at creating real opportunities for spontaneous and significant spoken and written interaction.

The case of technology-assisted methodology is also similar. Highly celebrated digital devices such as digital boards or tablets often become mere electronic mediums for doing the same old grammar drills already present in textbooks (activities such as matching columns, filling the gap exercises, true or false questions, etc.). Likewise, software like PowerPoint or websites like Kahoot or Genially are gamification tools that language teachers use to gamify or embellish the same kind of grammar/vocabulary exercises and explanations we have had in traditional textbooks for decades already.

In this sense, we must remain wary of appeals to novelty, whereby the use of technology is uncritically assumed to automatically foster abstract qualities in students such as learner autonomy, responsibility, lifelong learning, etc.:

There is a strong and repeated tendency for the introduction of some new technology by enthusiastic “technicians” to be accompanied by a retrograde and unreflecting pedagogy. A grammar drill on a computer is still a grammar drill and if learners are given little choice (or no training, which comes to the same thing) then it is a travesty to call their programmes “self-directed” (Gremmo & Riley, 1995, p. 153).

Likewise, it is also worth pointing out that many of these technological pseudo-advancements have often failed even before being absorbed by the TLT model. As seen in Larry Cuban’s book *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology since 1920* (1986) there is a long history of technicians promising educational utopias and failing to deliver them, as these were often poorly implemented.

Unsurprisingly, the use of new technological tools usually causes great conflicts with the functional rationality of traditional educational contexts. These contradictions show very well how the system’s procedures are always more important than innovation or even the best interest of students. If a teaching approach does not fit within the rationale and demands of the educational assembly line, it will simply be impossible to implement said approach. As Cuban (1986, pp. 56–59) explains:

Schools with self-contained classrooms, age-graded levels, standard class sizes, and uniform teaching loads are crafted instruments designed to cope with the mandate (...) within these overlapping school and classroom settings, the argument runs, teachers have rationed their time and energy to cope with conflicting and multiple demands and have constructed certain teaching practice that have emerged as resilient, simple, and efficient solutions in dealing with a large number of students in a small space for extended periods of time. Thus, the simplicity, versatility, and efficiency of those aids such as the textbook and chalkboard in coping with problems arising from the complicated realities of classroom instruction far exceed the limited benefits extracted from using machines.

Admittedly, there is some methodological value in trying to make traditional language teaching a bit more communicative, just like I also recognize that it is in good faith that teachers try to make their classes more palatable through digital gamification. However, we must make a clear distinction between “new ways of doing the same thing” and actually addressing the root of the problem.

In this regard, when teachers adopt these avant-garde methodologies and modern technologies as a mere complement or an add-on to the TLT model, they ultimately fail to (1) address the inherent structural problems with TLT, and (2) understand and take seriously the transforming methodological potential of said technological and methodological advancements—especially in critical terms, as it will be argued later on—.

In conclusion, TLT can be understood as a teaching-learning methodology that is optimized to fulfill the most basic requirements set by the educational system: that is, to transmit information and make students pass their tests in the most effortless and cost-efficient way possible. Likewise, the need for managerial efficiency as well as its teacher-centeredness once again embodies a notion of scarcity, which reflects the material conditions of the epoch where the modern educational system was created.

At its worst, TLT would then be standardized, exam-oriented, teacher-centered, and textbook-based. Well-intended teachers may try to incorporate better approaches into their teaching practice, but usually never to the extent of really challenging this structural inner logic of the system. Now, this description of TLT may seem unnecessary to the reader, after all, we have all most likely experienced the TLT model in the flesh.

However, the point of this analysis is to argue that traditional language teaching is not just one more language teaching method among many others, but exceptional in that it was

born together with and as a consequence of the modern nation-state. Thus, TLT is not just a methodological option, but the method by default of the industrial education system.

TLT is methodology reduced to its most basic technical functions, the bare minimum required for the assembly line to continue running; basic requirements which boil down to the linear transmission of information and making students pass exams. This is important because it means that as long as attempts for methodological innovation stay within the context and limitations set by formal education, these innovations will inevitably consist of simply mitigating the damning effects of TLT.

In this sense, understanding the historical and systemic reasons behind the operatory logic of the TLT model is crucial to assessing pedagogic practices from a critical perspective, as this allows us to see the systemic –and thus political— reasons that limit the capacity of educators to bring about truly ground-breaking teaching methodologies. Ultimately, real education reform must address these fundamental issues, which would have important philosophical, political, and ideological implications.

Information Societies, the Land of Plenty

Since it is the product of the system, traditional language teaching has, despite its many flaws, survived till our days, and along with it, the old assumption that language and its means of instruction are vastly scarce resources. In line with Illich's critique, we see that most if not all language educational organizations today (both in the public and private sector) legitimize their authority and old-fashioned methods on the basis of this perceived scarcity.

In a real sense, the way we today teach languages still denotes this deep-rooted idea that language teachers and educational institutions are the ones who must teach languages, for we still assume that they are the ones who monopolize foreign languages and the savoir-faire on how to teach them properly. Thus, learners are regarded as passive beings, ineluctably dependent on authority figures to be taught, being given materials, practice, assessment, etc. Nonetheless, this mindset becomes anachronic, counter-productive, and factually wrong in the context of our current globalized information societies.

Nowadays, at least in nations with a certain level of development, most people already live immersed in information. Nonetheless, the majority tend to live comfortably inside their information bubbles produced in their respective local tongues, never venturing into exotic linguistic territories. However, the potential is there. They are always one click away from accessing endless hours of online free input and practice in different languages.

As long as these learners have access to the internet, they can start fully immersing themselves in new languages, something unprecedented in the history of language learning.

This easy access to free native input in most languages makes the information society a perfect historical period for language learning. Also, there is an ever-expanding offer and demand for inexpensive language learning materials, private tutors, and learning tools students can acquire to enhance or complement their learning process. To commensurate the size of this industry, let us just consider the fact that for example, “the English language learning market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6.2% from 2020 to 2027 to reach \$54.92 billion by 2027” (Meticulous Research, 2021).

As a consequence, this abundance of both free and cheap access to learning resources means that traditional language educators have lost their *de facto* monopoly on language, and with it, a big part of their power as it has been traditionally constructed in our societies. Seeing this profusion of available learning materials, digital tools as well as free access to native content and speakers, we can logically conclude that scarcity is no longer a barrier for anyone with access to the internet, offline materials, or self-access centers that may help students by directly providing said materials or even by helping them find and manage online content, materials and learning tools.

In fact, most of the value that language teachers have traditionally passed down to students is already being provided by online teachers and content creators on the internet, largely for free and in exorbitant amounts. Having reached this point, let us now contemplate the multiplicity of resources learners can nowadays use to study and practice languages autonomously:

- Grammar: thousands of teachers upload to the internet written and audiovisual explanations of most grammar points in all major languages. Now, if having real online teachers teaching grammar for free was not enough, students can also borrow from libraries and self-access centers, buy, or sometimes even download for free all kinds of grammar reference books that come with comprehensive explanations and long lists of grammar exercises for drilling practice.
- Vocabulary: students can learn vocabulary simply through direct exposure to and study of native input. Nowadays, native content in major languages is ubiquitous online and mostly free in printed form (as in libraries or self-access centers) as well as in audiovisual form (on the internet, TV, radio, etc.). Furthermore, students can also do active study with free online vocabulary classes (on YouTube, blogs, websites,

etc.), leveled readers, vocabulary boosters, dictionaries, using spaced repetition software such as Anki, etc.

- Phonetics (input & output): similar to the case of grammar, there is plenty of audiovisual and printed resources for learners to study phonetics and practice all aspects of it: pronunciation, intonation, stress patterns, etc. Besides, audio editing software and recording devices are nowadays easy to find. In fact, all phones can record, reproduce and even edit audio, making them a great tool to practice pronunciation alone. Of course, if we consider the possibility of practicing with people, it is also possible to find online language exchange partners who can help in a more personalized way.
- Passive language skills (input): Listening comprehension can be developed using leveled audio materials or by simply listening to many hours of interesting and comprehensible native content: YouTube videos, movies, series, music, podcasts, radio, etc. Likewise, learners can develop reading comprehension with the help of learning materials (such as leveled books, vocabulary boosters, etc.) or by simply spending enough time reading interesting content aimed at L1 speakers as well as learners (books, blogs, social media, news outlets, etc.).
- Active language skills (output): Given the interpersonal and communicative nature of language learning, teachers can still be of use to students, especially regarding writing, speaking, and spoken interaction skills. Nevertheless, there are still many alternatives available: online language exchange partners (to practice with and correct each other's mistakes), social media interaction, proofreading software (automatic and community-based), individual speaking practice with techniques such as shadowing, recording oneself speaking, etc. Moreover, if learners are willing to spend some money, they can for example travel abroad or get conversation practice from online language tutors or proofreaders whenever they feel necessary at very reasonable prices depending on the language.

In this small summary of free available learning materials and tools, we can see how technology (the internet but also software) has vastly liberalized access to information and decentralized its distribution. The sociopolitical implications of this trend are remarkable: nowadays, any motivated learner with access to the internet and basic computer literacy can potentially teach themselves any well-documented language.

Conclusion and Discussion

In sum, we can observe that standardized language education as well as its traditional pedagogy are largely constructed on a historical notion of scarcity which no longer is the reality of our modern information societies. Today, students are no longer dependent on institutions to access materials and learn languages, as the current abundance of available learning materials, native content, and tools makes learning a language to proficiency by autonomous means a feasible and rather inexpensive goal.

In this regard, self-access centers can also fulfill a key role as not only direct providers of learning resources, but especially as providers of mentorship and guidance for students on how to be autonomous as well as on how to access and manage properly this ocean of online resources brought about by our current information societies. Likewise, it would be beneficial to continue developing an understanding of self-access centers as meeting points for self-directed learners in order to foster a much more social and communal approach to autonomous learning.

Moreover, based on this analysis, I argue that TLT is not just another teaching methodology, but the methodology by default of the system, as it represents the minimal pedagogic effort necessary for the system to “work” and reproduce itself. Thus, methodologies that do not challenge the functional rationality of educational institutions are bound to either become assimilated by the TLT model or be discarded for incompatibilities with the system.

Serious education reform must then challenge these core principles of the system, so the resulting new conditions of possibility may allow the implementation of methodologies more in tune with the reality of our information societies, fostering the development of learner autonomy, critical thinking, and life-long learning.

Notes on the Contributor

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