Kumaravadivelu, B.: *Understanding Language Teaching. From Method to Postmethod*, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 84-85

**1.2. Approach, Method, and Technique**

Antony (1963) was perhaps the first in modern times to articulate a framework

for understanding the constituents of method. His purpose, a laudable

one, was to provide much-needed coherence to the conception and

representation of elements that constitute language teaching. He proposed

a three-way distinction: ***approach*, *method*, and *technique***. He defined **approach**

as “a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language

and the nature of language teaching and learning. It describes the

nature of the subject matter to be taught. It states a point of view, a philosophy,

an article of faith . . .” (Antony, 1963, pp. 63–64). Thus, an approach

embodies the theoretical principles governing language learning and language

teaching. A **method**, however, is “an overall plan for the orderly presentation

of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of

which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic,

a method is procedural” (p. 65). As such, within one approach there can

be many methods. Methods are implemented in the classroom through

what are called techniques. A **technique** is defined as “a particular trick,

strategem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective” (p.

66). The tripartite framework is hierarchical in the sense that approach

informs method, and method informs techniques.

When it was introduced, the Antony framework was welcomed as a helpful

tool for making sense of different parts of language teaching operations,

and it was in use for a long time. However, a lack of precise formulation of

the framework resulted in a widespread dissatisfaction with it. Antony himself

felt that modifications and refinements of his framework are “possible”

and even “desirable” primarily because the distinction between approach

and method on one hand, and method and technique on the other hand,

was not clearly delineated. The way approach and method are used interchangeably

in some of the literature on L2 teaching testifies to the blurred

boundaries between the two. Secondly, the inclusion of specific items

within a constituent is sometimes based on subjective judgments. For instance,

Antony considered pattern practice a method, and imitation a technique

when, in fact, both of them can be classified as classroom *techniques*

because they both refer to a sequence of classroom activities performed in

the classroom environment, prompted by the teacher and practiced by the

learner.

The Antony framework is flawed in yet another way. It attempted to portray

the entire language teaching operations as a simple, hierarchical relationship

between approach, method, and technique, without in any way

considering the complex connections between intervening factors such as

societal demands, institutional resources and constraints, instructional effectiveness,

and learner needs. After taking these drawbacks into consideration,

Clarke (1983) summarized the inadequacy of the Antony framework

thus:

Approach, by limiting our perspective of language learning and teaching,

serves as a blinder which hampers rather than encourages, professional

growth. Method is so vague that it means just about anything that anyone

wants it to mean, with the result that, in fact, it means nothing. And technique,

by giving the impression that teaching activities can be understood as

abstractions separate from the context in which they occur, obscures the fact

that classroom practice is a dynamic interaction of diverse systems. (p. 111)