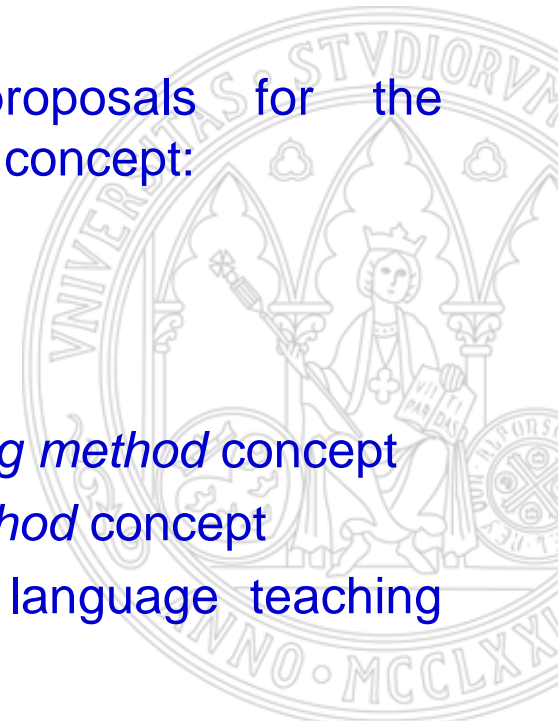# BLOCK 1. Introduction

Unit 1.2.

The "method" concept in language teaching

Outline

1. Objectives of this unit

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

4. The two big method strands in language teaching: deductive and inductive

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept:

    a) Anthony (1963)

    b) Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)

    c) Sánchez (1997, 2009)

6. Clarifying basic terms related to the *language teaching method* concept

7. The basic components of *the language teaching method* concept

8. Activities: A fundamental identifying feature of a language teaching method

1. Objectives of this unit

1. Become familiar with the most important proposals about the concept of "method" and recognize the similarities and differences between them.

2. Define a conceptual framework of method which will cover all the analysis of methods within the subject.

3. Distinguish the components of method: sets of principles and beliefs underlying *(why),* content and objectives *(what)* and activities *(how).*

4. Distinguish activities as one of the ingredients of method for use in the subsequent analysis of specific methods.

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

- "A language cannot be taught. One can only create conditions for learning to take place".
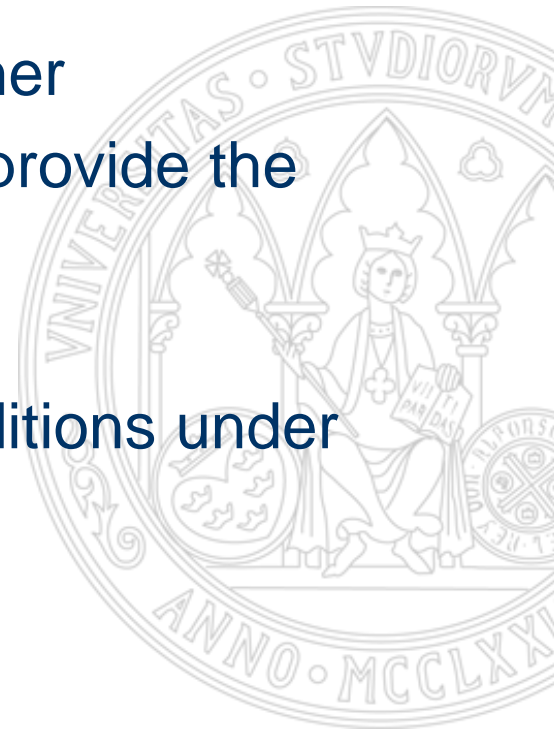
  Wilhelm von Humboldt, German philosopher

- "I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn".

  Albert Einstein, North-American inventor

- "It is the teacher's function to contrive conditions under which students learn".

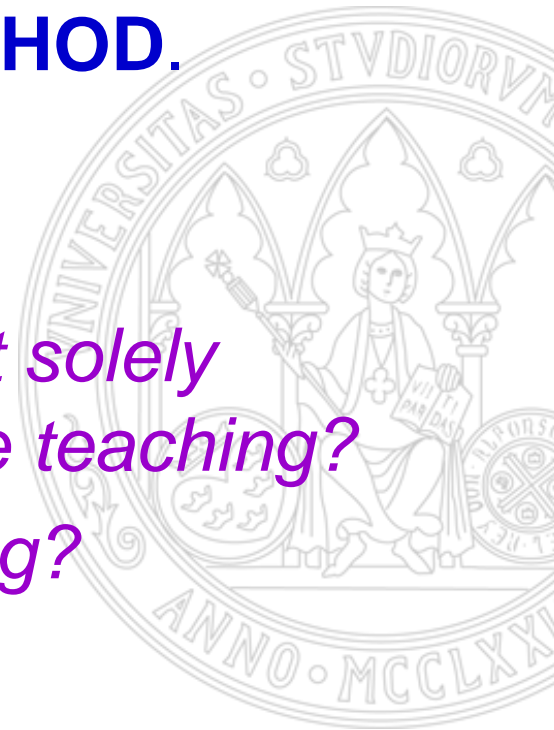 B.F. Skinner, North-American psychologist

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

If we are going to perform a diachronical study of language teaching methods in this course, we should first define the object of our study: **METHOD**.

So…

1) *What is a method in general, not solely restricted to the field of language teaching?*
2) *And applied to language teaching?*

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

1) What is a **method** in general (from the Greek word "méthodos")

Here you have the definitions from two well-known dictionaries:

1.a) *Cambridge Advanced Dictionary Online British English* (http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/method?q=method)

A particular way of doing something.

– *Travelling by train is still one of the safest methods of transport.*

– *The new teaching methods encourage children to think for themselves.*

1.b) *Merriam Webster Dictionary Online*

(http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/method)

1: a **procedure or process for attaining an object**: as *a (1)*: a systematic procedure, technique, or mode of inquiry employed by or proper to a particular discipline or art *a (2)*: a systematic plan followed in presenting material for instruction *b (1)*: **a way, technique, or process of or for doing something** *b (2)*: **a body of skills or techniques**

2: a discipline that deals with the principles and techniques of scientific inquiry

3 *a:* orderly arrangement, development, or classification: plan *b*: the habitual practice of orderliness and regularity

– *He claims to have developed a new method for growing tomatoes.*

– *Their teaching method tries to adapt lessons to each student.*

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

2) And applied to language teaching?

Cook (2008: 235):

"The term 'teaching method' is used in most of this book as a broad cover term for the different activities that go on in language teaching".

Right… But what are the reasons behind the use of one or another type of activity? What parameters does a language teaching method need to take into account? In other words…

a) What is the object of study in a language teaching method?
b) How is this object of study attained?

↓

2. What is the "method" concept in language teaching?

2) And applied to language teaching?

Richards & Rodgers (2001: 1)

For these authors, the *method* concept in teaching is "the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning"

What about the following terms? Are they synonyms of the method *concept in language teaching? How are they related to it?*

Methodology

Approach

Curriculum

Syllabus

Technique

Activity

Exercise

Task

Section 5 will refine Richards and Rodger's definition and will define the concepts behind the above terms too.
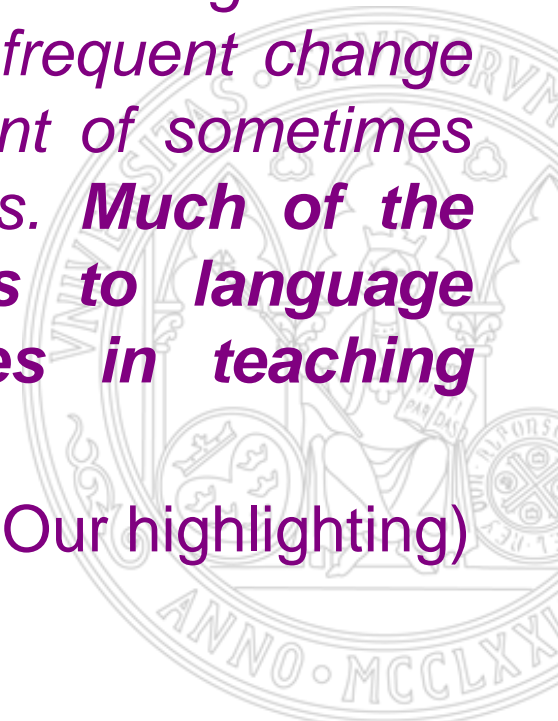
3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century. […] Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterised by frequent change and innnovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies. **Much of the impetus for change in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods.**

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 1. Our highlighting)

3. Language teaching methods:
Necessary or redundant?
Is there the universal, ideal single method?

Throughout the twentieth century, the language teaching profession was involved in a search. That search for what has popularly been called "methods", or ideally, a single method, generalizable across widely varying audiences, that would successfully teach students a foreign language in the classroom. Historical accounts of the profession tend therefore to describe a succession of methods, each of which is more or less discarded in due course as a new method takes place.

(Brown, 2000: 169)

As we will see in Block 3, the 19th century was the triggering point for this "productivity" in the following century, since many methods appeared in that century. In fact, much of the work by 20th century methodologists consisted in improving methods that had been devised the century before.

3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

✓ The Pennsylvania Project (1965-1969) represents the 20th century's eagerness to establish the "best" language teaching method.

✓ The theoretical foundation of the project was based on the idea that the choice of *method* was the most significant decision on the part of language teaching professionals: the choice of method would determine all pedagogical decisions concerned with triggering and optimising students' learning.

Sub-blocks 4.5 and 4.6

However…

3. Language teaching methods:
Necessary or redundant?
Is there the universal, ideal single method?

✓ In recent years "it has been argued that we are no longer asking the right question, that Method is not and cannot provide, 'the answer' to making English language teaching and learning more effectively" (Hall, 2011: 59)

✓ *Some say that methods are prescriptions for classroom behaviour, and that teachers are encouraged by textbook publishers and academics to implement them whether or not the methods are appropriate for a particular context (Pennycock, 1989). Others have noticed that the search for the best method is ill-advised (Prabhu, 1990; Bartolome, 1994); that teachers do not think about methods when planning their lessons (Long, 1991); that methodological options tell us little about what really goes on in classrooms (Katz, 1996); and that teachers experience a certain fatigue concerning the constant coming and going of fashions in methods (Rajagopalan, 2007). Hinkel (2006) also notes that the need for situationally relevant language pedagogy has brought about the decline of methods.*

(Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: xii)

✓ Thus the notion of "Postmethod" era (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001, 2003, 2006) has gained momentum in the literature and in teacher training.

Sub-block 4.6

3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

Do you think that there is a universal, ideal single method that can cater for all students regardless of their age, academic profile and nationality? Which factors do you think that have to be considered to answer this question?
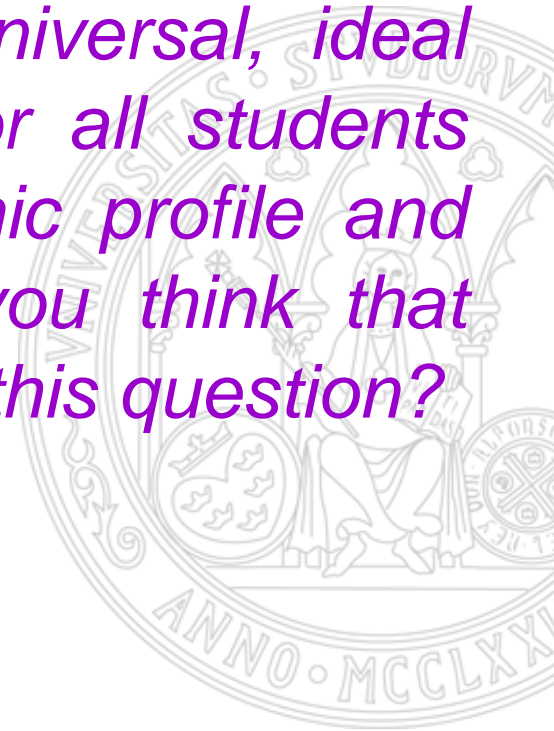
3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

Do you think that there is a universal, ideal single method that can cater for all students regardless of their age, academic profile and nationality? Which factors do you think that have to be considered to answer this question?

1. Empirical data supporting one or another method

❑ "For thousands of years in the actual practice of L2 teaching and learning, development and refinement of methods has been carried out experientially, experimentally, and intuitively" (Hinkel, 2005: xix-xx).

❑ "At this point in the evolution of our field, there is little empirical support for a particular method" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: xiii)

For a very accessible review of comparative method studies, see Chapter 1 in R. Ellis (2012).

3. Language teaching methods: Necessary or redundant? Is there the universal, ideal single method?

Do you think that there is a universal, ideal single method that can cater for all students regardless of their age, academic profile and nationality? Which factors do you think that have to be considered to answer this question?

1. Empirical data supporting one or another method

2. Elements interacting in the implementation of language teaching methods in classrooms

As Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) explain, the implementation of a method in the classroom depends on

1) Who the teacher is and his/her professional expertise and experience (own understanding, beliefs, style…)
2) His/her students' profiles
3) The teacher's and the students' expectations
4) Institutional constraints
5) Sociocultural context where teaching takes place

↓

3. Language teaching methods:
Necessary or redundant?
Is there the universal, ideal single method?

It is clear that universal solutions that are transposed acritically, and often accompanied by calls for increased standardisation, and which ignore indigenous conditions, the diversity of learners, and the agency of teachers are immanent in a modernism that no longer applies, if it ever did.

(Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008: 168)

↓

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY *Sub-block 4.6*

So the search for the "best" and single method continues to be similar to "the search for the Holy Grail", and will probably remain like this…

4. The two big method strands in language teaching: Deductive and inductive

Learning takes place in two ways:

❑ **Deductively** (general > specific).

- From generalization to specific instances or subsumed facts that are inferred or deduced from a general principle (Brown, 2000).

- Related to rationalism (Descartes): Instead of experience, the acquisition of knowledge in the rationalist theory is connected to *a priori* processes, i.e. independent from experience and dependent on reason

❑ **Inductively** (specific > general).

- Starting by storing a number of specific instances and inducing a general law or rule or conclusion that governs the specific instances.

- St. Augustine, Comenius, Vives

- Related to empiricism (Hume, Locke): All knowledge derives from sense experience. Discovery learning

- *You cannot teach a man anything. You can only help him discover it within himself.* Galileo

Which mode is associated with classroom learning and which one with natural learning?

4. The two big method strands in language teaching: Deductive and inductive

Watch out… In language teaching, inductive *is used in two different contexts:*

1) General learning context: As related to practice and experiential learning in stark contrast with deductive learning

2) Form-focused learning (grammar, vocabulary, mechanics): discovery-learning or conscious-awareness exercises, etc.

Students have to discover the underlying rules or meanings of language by themselves without the teacher or the course materials explicitly providing them with such rules or meanings.

4. The two big method strands in language teaching: deductive and inductive

Learning mode	Procedures	Methods
Deductive	• Learning of rules, reasoning, abstractions, generalizations followed by practice. • Emphasis on forms	G-T, Cognitive Approach
Inductive	• Practice and learning through repetition • Absence of prior or later study of explicit formal rules • Emphasis on content or message	• DM • Structurally based methods • strong version of CLT and spin-offs (CLIL, TBLT, the Lexical Approach, etc.)
Deductive + inductive	Focus on form and content	Weak version of CLT

Table 1. Deductive and inductive modes of learning and teaching (adapted from Criado & Sánchez, 2009)

*Watch out: the categorisation here is presented from a **wide, general** perspective. Nuances emerge in several aspects such as grammar teaching, etc. For example, it would be incorrect to assume that structurally based methods do not deal with forms, but certainly they do not follow the explicit rule-focused procedures of the Grammar-Translation Method (G-T).*

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

1) Anthony (1963)
2) Richards and Rodgers (1986, 2001)
3) Sánchez (1997, 2009)

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

1) **Anthony (1963).**

   ❑ A landmark in the operationalization of the *method* concept in language teaching.

   ❑ In order to define the method concept in language teaching, Anthony uses three concepts in turn: *approach*, *method* and *techniques*.

   ❑ "The arrangement is hierarchical. The organizational key is that *techniques* carry out a *method* which is consistent with an *approach*" (Anthony, 1963: 63)

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the opeationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

1) **Anthony (1963).**

a) Approach: "a set of correlative assumptions dealing with

the nature of language and the nature of language teaching

and learning" (Anthony, 1963: 63-64)

  Example by Anthony: audio-oral approach

- Theory of language: structural. Language is oral first, then written

- Theory of learning: languages are habits, learned by frequent practice

- Theory of teaching: languages must be taught by means of practice and repetition

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

1) Anthony (1963)

b) Method: "an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material" (Anthony, 1963: 65).

Influenced by such factors as the age of the student, his/her cultural background, his/her previous experience with English, the experience of the teacher, his/her level of English mastery and the goal of the course.

Example by Anthony:

- Approach: audio-oral.

- Methods: *mim-mem* (from memorising a dialogue/situation to practising drills) and *pattern practice* (from practising drills to memorising a dialogue/situation).

- Both methods select specific grammatical and phonological structures, presented in a different order.

Nowadays, we consider mim-mem *and* pattern-practice *a type of exercise/activity.*

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the opeationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

1) Anthony (1963)

c) Technique: from Anthony's account, it can be inferred that techniques refer to the tools through which methods are implemented in the classroom. "Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well" (Anthony, 1963: 66).

Examples: laboratory tape-recorders and phonographs.

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept
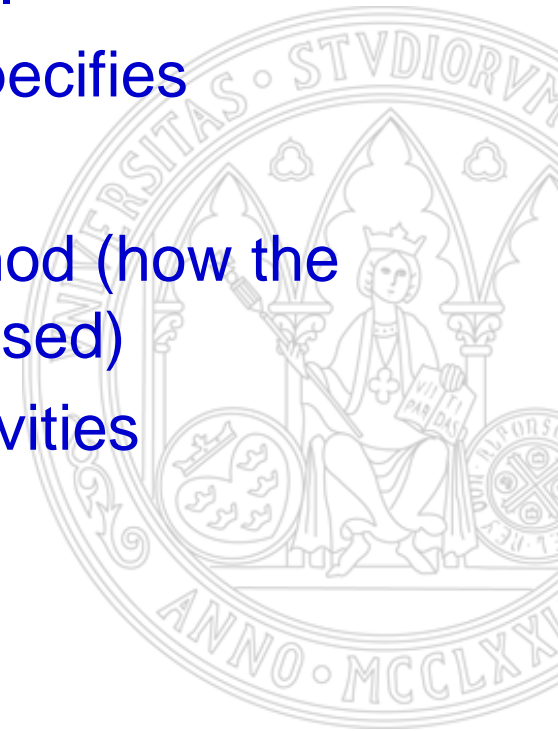
2) Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)

❑ Proposed a reformulation of the concept of *method* based on Anthony's (1963).

❑ Approach, method and technique were renamed as *approach*, *design* and *procedure*, with a superordinate term: *method*.

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

2) Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)

 a) Approach: assumptions, beliefs, and theories about the nature of language and language learning.

 b) Design: the level of method analysis that specifies

1. Objectives of the method
2. The syllabus model adopted in the method (how the language content is selected and organised)
3. Type of learning tasks and teaching activities
4. Roles of learners
5. Roles of teachers
6. Roles of instructional materials

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

2) Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)

c) Procedure: the techniques, practices and behaviours that result from a particular approach and design.

*At the level of **design** we saw that a method will advocate certain types of teaching activities as a consequence of its theoretical assumptions about language and learning. At the level of **procedure**, we are concerned with how these tasks and activities are integrated into lessons and used as the basis for teaching and learning.*

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 31. Our highlighting)

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

2) Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)

❑ Their proposal explicitly drew our attention to very important aspects in language teaching, namely, all those included within "design".

❑ However, as pointed out by Brown (2000), their attempt to give a new meaning to the concept of "method" was not successful:

– Richards & Rodgers' "method" → "methodology".

– Richards & Rodgers' "design" → "curricula" (USA), "syllabus" (UK).

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

3) Sánchez (1997, 2009)

Sánchez's proposal perfectly matches Stern's concept of language teaching method:

A method, however ill-defined it may be, is more than a single strategy or a particular technique; it is a 'theory' of language teaching […] which resulted from practical and theoretical discussions in a given historical context. It usually implies and sometimes overtly expresses certain objectives, and a particular view of language; it makes assumptions about the language learner; and underlying it are certain beliefs about the nature of the language learning process.

(Stern, 1983: 452-453).

5. A critical comparative analysis of three proposals for the operationalization of the *language teaching method* concept

3) Sánchez (1997, 2009)

Axis 1. THE *WHY* OF A METHOD. **Underlying principles and beliefs**	• Linguistic theory (nature of language) • Psychological theory (learning principles) • Pedagogic theory (teaching principles) • Cognitive theory (psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic processes) • Sociological theory (contextual, educational, geographical conditions…) • "Economic" principles (as applied to teaching planning and management)
Axis 2. THE *WHAT* OF A METHOD. **Contents as derived from previous principles and beliefs: goals of learning and teaching**	Goals of learning and teaching: a) Selection and structuring of the elements of the linguistic code (morphology, syntax, vocabulary, graphic system, sound system) b) Selection and structuring of pragmatic elements (sociolinguistic, contextual factors…)
Axis 3. THE *HOW* OF A METHOD. **Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students**	Procedures (ways and manners): a) Related to pedagogy: typology, design and sequencing of activities; teacher's and students' roles b) Related to psychology: attention to students' age, general and specific motivational elements and cognitive processes c) Related to the pragmatic and sociological context d) Related to the planning and management of activities in the language classroom (distribution, length, quantity, etc.).

Table 2. Components of a language teaching method. Translated and adapted from Sánchez (2009: 20)

6. Clarifying key terms related to the *language teaching method* concept

✓ Now that we have studied the previous authors' operationalization of the *method* concept of language teaching, let us proceed to clarify the meaning of the terms included in slide 8, which constitute several key terms related to the *method* concept in language teaching.
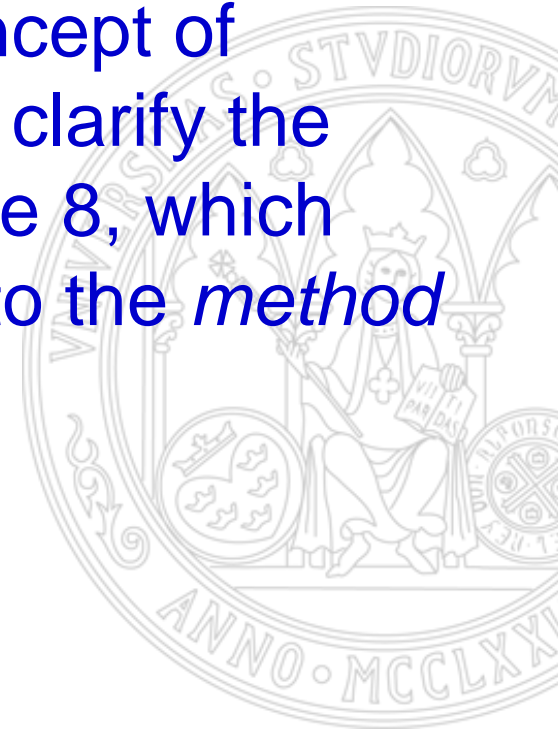
6. Clarifying key terms related to the *language teaching method* concept

Methodology:

1 (in language teaching) the study of the practices and procedures used in teaching, and the principles and beliefs that underlie them.

Methodology includes:

a) *Study of the nature of language skills (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, listening) and procedures for teaching them.*

b) *Study of the preparation of lesson plans, materials, and textbooks for teaching language skills*

c) *The evaluation and comparison of language teaching methods (e.g. the audiolingual method).*

2 such practices, procedures, beliefs themselves. One can for example criticize or praise the methodology of a particular language course.

3 (in research) the procedures used in carrying out an investigation, including the methods used to collect data and analyze data.

(Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 363-364)

6. Clarifying key terms related to the *language teaching method* concept

Approach: "Theoretical positions and beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of language learning, and the applicability of both to pedagogical settings". (Brown, 2000: 171).

Curriculum/syllabus: "Designs for carrying out a particular language program. Features include a primary concern with the specification of linguistic and subject-matter objectives, sequencing, and materials to meet the needs of a designated group of learners in a defined context" (Brown, 2000: 171).

Following a well-established trend in the FLT literature, the term "syllabus" will be used in this course to refer to language content and "curricula" to "design".

6. Clarifying key terms related to the *language teaching method* concept

Technique (also commonly referred to by other terms such as **task, procedure, activity, exercise**). Any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or devices used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives. (Brown, 2000: 171).

If you want to dig deeper in relation to technique…

Exercise: "In teaching, an activity that is used to practise a learning item". (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 208)

Activity: "In language teaching, a general term for any classroom procedure that requires students to use and practise their available language resources". (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 9)

Technique: "In teaching, a specific procedure for carrying out a teaching activity, such as the ways a teacher corrects students' errors or sets up group activities" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 590)

For more information about activities, see section 8 in this unit.

For the definition of task, see Unit 4.3.4.

7. The basic components of the *language teaching method* concept

✓ In this course we will largely draw on Sánchez's (1997, 2009) operationalization of the *method* concept of language teaching

   a)   For the definition of the different components of language teaching methods

   b)   As the framework of analysis of the methods in the following units (see slide 36), with the exception of unit 3.2.3, due to its specific characteristics
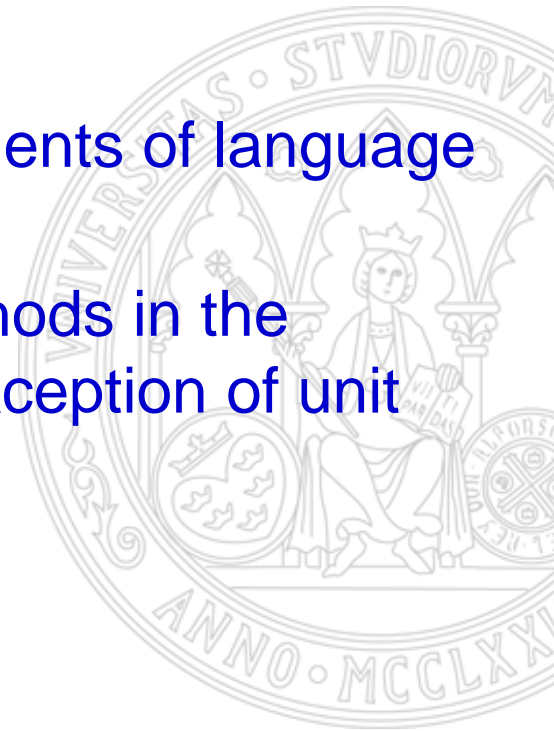
7. The basic components of the *language teaching method* concept

1) Goals

2) (Historical) background / rationale

3) Analysis of the components of language teaching methods

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

❑ Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)

Axis 2. The What. Contents as derived from previous principles and beliefs: Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications: Selection and structuring of the language elements

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Activities (activity typology, sequencing principles, attention to students' age and motivation, lesson planning / procedure, planning and management issues)

❑ Roles of teacher (including feedback issues)

❑ Roles of students

❑ Roles of instructional materials

4) Critical assessment of the method (positive and negative aspects, influence on other methods, etc.)

1, 2, 3

8. Activities: a fundamental identifying feature of a language teaching method

✓ According to Sánchez (2009), in the traditional methodology, the term "exercise" was used to name actions such as memorising grammar rules, practising those rules or performing direct and inverse translation. The variety of such exercises was limited as the very word reflects in its function and nature (*exercise*, from the verb *exercise*).

✓ Due to the development of CLT from the 1980s the language teaching profession conferred a new meaning to the term "activity" which distinguishes it from "exercise".

✓ An activity is not solely restricted to formal elements, but it can also foster the four skills, interaction between the students, pragmatic abilities, etc.

8. Activities: a fundamental identifying feature of a language teaching method

- An activity is the unit of teaching action which leads to the attainment of a learning or teaching objective through the application of a specific teaching strategy or procedure.

- Hence, an activity has two key elements:
  - a **goal** (the objective aimed at by the activity),
  - and the **teaching strategies** (the means or procedures to reach such a goal).

  Watch out: a teaching strategy is not the same as a learning strategy!

- For instance, "the goal of a reading activity might be getting the gist. This might be attained through different strategies: matching paragraphs with pictures depicting the main scenes, selecting the best summary out of a list, asking the students to provide a summary themselves, etc." (Criado *et al.,* 2010: 112)

- An activity also encompasses the **timing** and the **resources** required to implement the activity, which are derived from the intended goal and strategies established to obtain such objectives.