



Repositioning ELT: From disconnectedness to connections

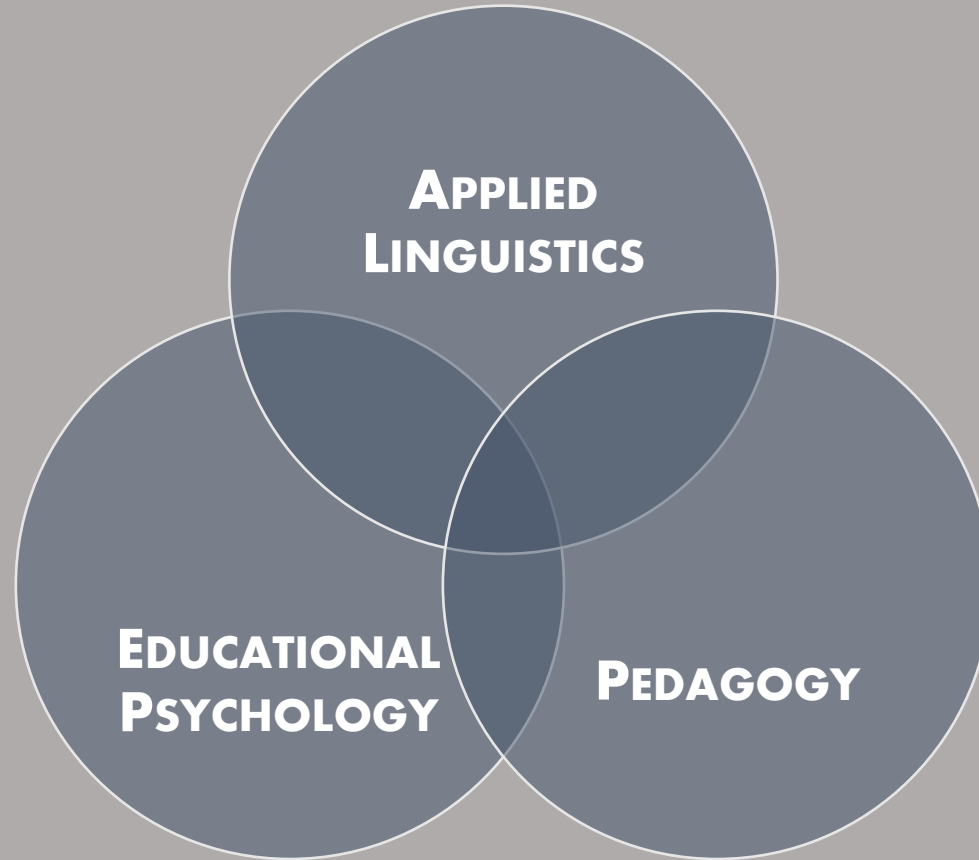
Achilleas Kostoulas

ELT Connect ♦ Graz, 11 November 2017

Tracing the outlines of ELT



Towards a definition of ELT



Forging connections between disciplines

“The encounter between two disciplines doesn’t take place where one begins to reflect on the other, but when one discipline realises that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to the one confronted by the other” (Deleuze 1986: 387)

Deleuze, G. (1986) *The Movement-Image* (Tomlinson, H. & Habberjam, B. trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.



ELT as an interdisciplinary field

While our outlook is open to insights from the informing disciplines, these insights:

- a) Must complement each other (e.g., linguistic insights should help us to understand psychological processes etc.)
- b) Must have direct and meaningful connections to practice



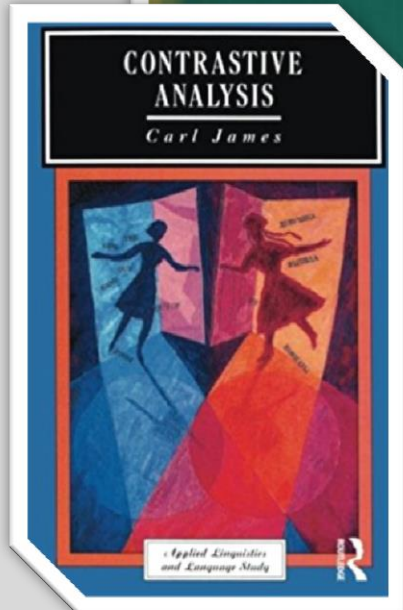
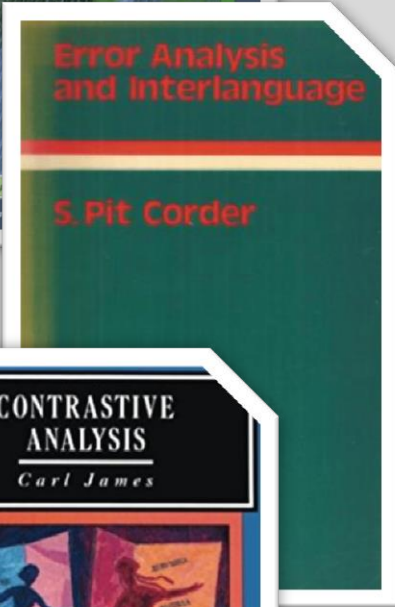
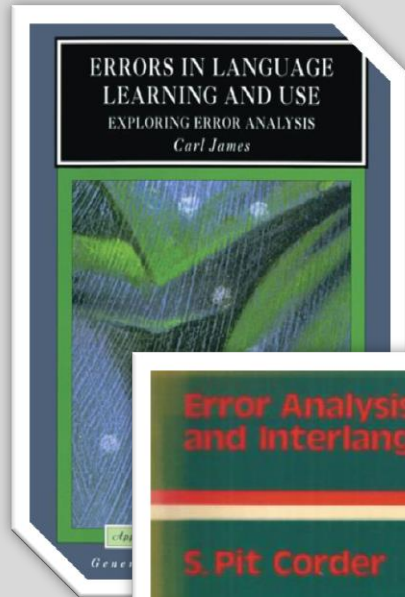
Rethinking Applied Linguistics



Early strands of investigation

Institutionally established in the late 1940s and early 1950s; pragmatically oriented.

- Interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972)
- Contrastive analysis (e.g., James, 1980)
- Error analysis (e.g., Corder, 1981)
- Processability hypothesis (Pienemann, 1998)



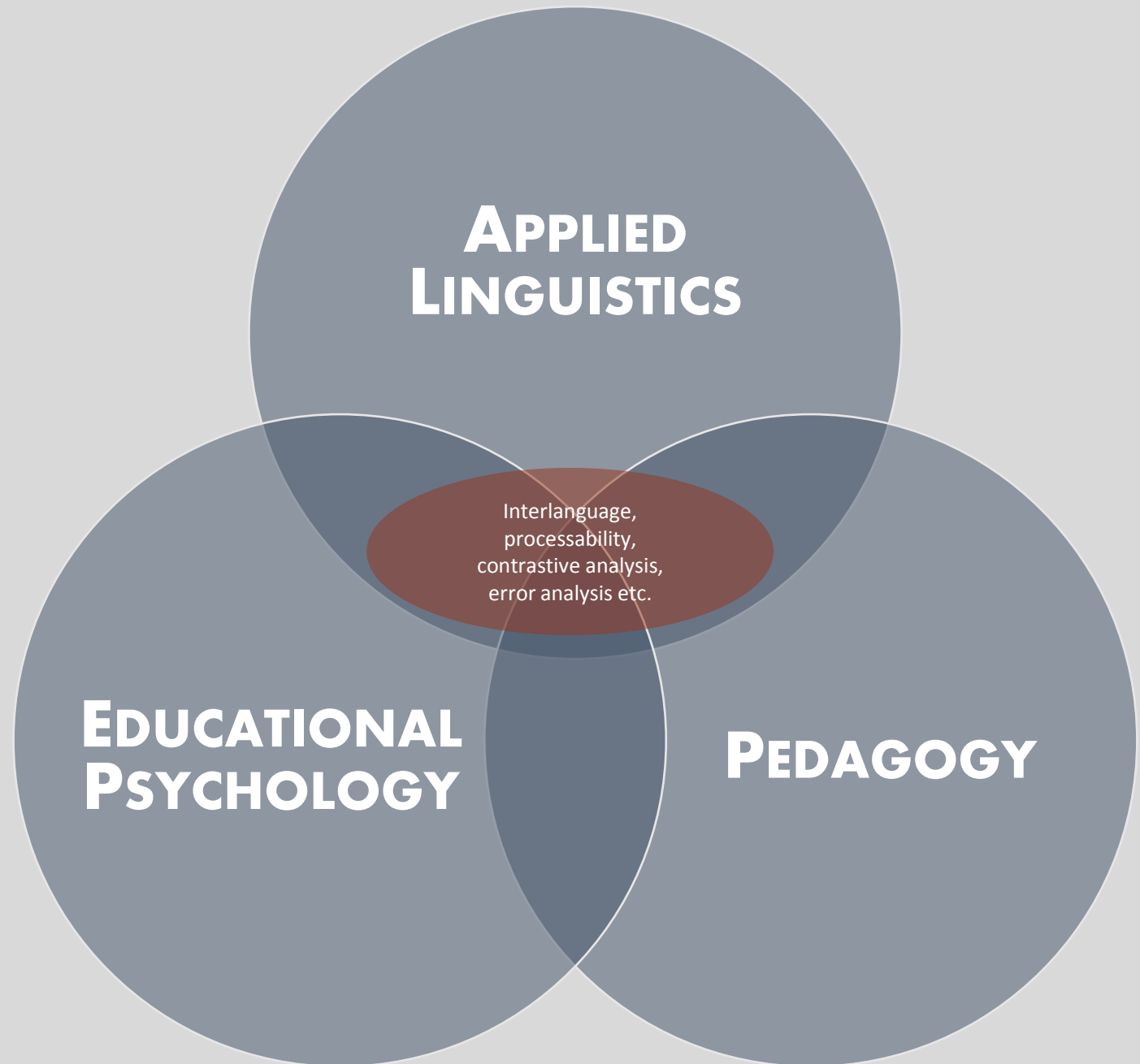
Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error analysis and interlanguage*. Oxford: OUP.

James, C. (1980). *Contrastive analysis*. London: Longman.

Pienemann, M. (1998). Language processing and second language development: Processability Theory. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 10, 209-232.

Connections to ELT





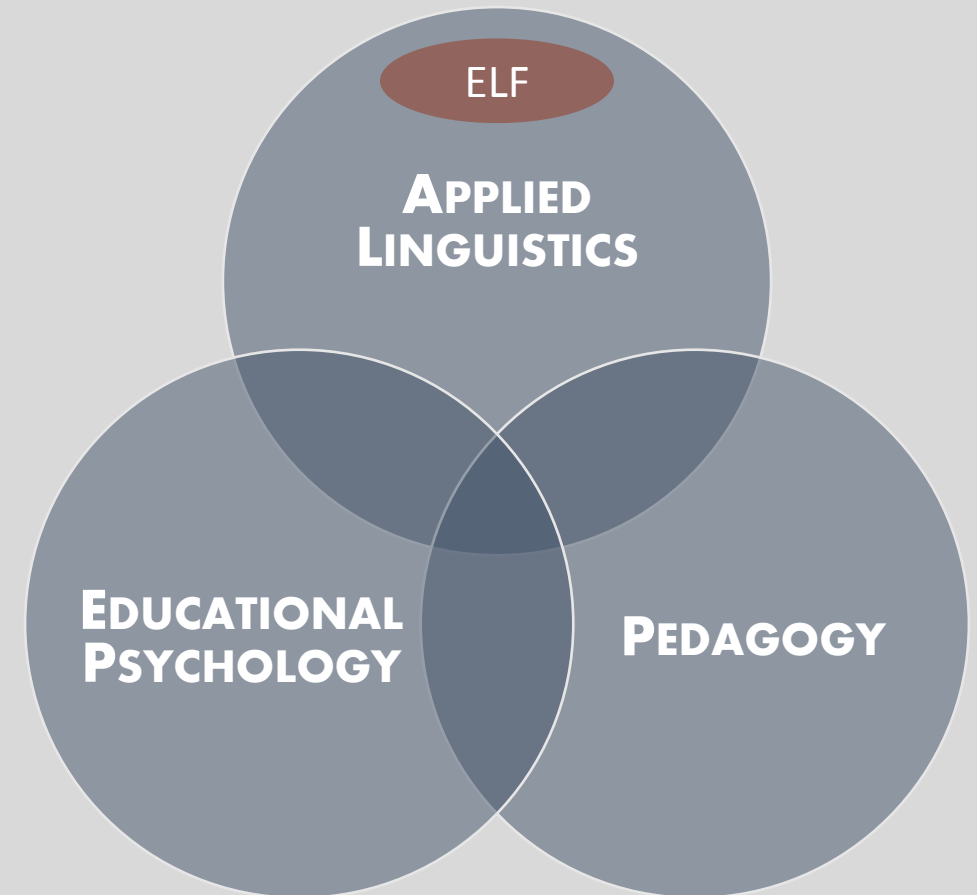
Examples of disconnectedness (1): English as a Lingua Franca

- ELF involves the systematic linguistic study of “any use of English among speakers of different languages, for whom English is the communicative medium, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011: 7)
- Emphasis on the language **user**, not the language **learner**.

Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Relation to ELT

- ELF research is a linguistic, but not pedagogical, project:
“These chapters ... have been concerned with giving an empirical description of how linguistic forms are used in ELF interactions. They are emphatically not intended to prescribe what forms of English people *should* use to ensure effective communication.” (Seidlhofer 2011: 152)
- This generates valuable linguistic insights, but the links to language teaching need to be developed.



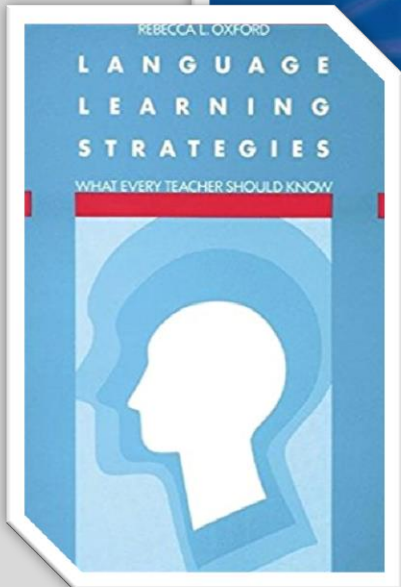
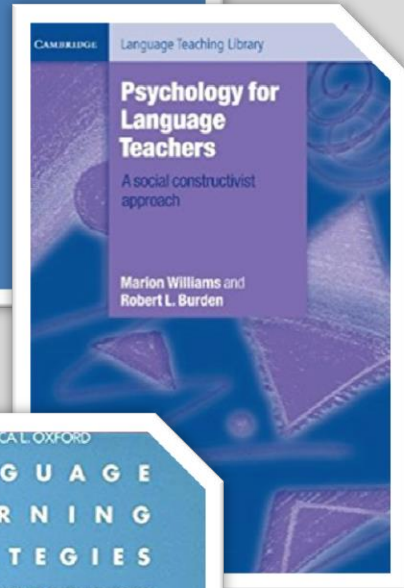
Linguistic repositioning

There are still many questions relevant to teaching that applied linguistics can (should?) answer, e.g.:

- What varieties of English are most appropriate to teach in different educational settings? (World Englishes)
- Why do learners have different attitudes towards different varieties of English? (Sociolinguistics)
- What are the effects on local linguistic ecologies when English language programmes are implemented? (Critical applied linguistics)

Rethinking Educational Psychology





Language Learning Psychology

Early work comprised multiple research strands, focussing on why and how languages are learnt:

- Language learning aptitude (e.g., Carroll & Sapon, 1959)
- Language learning strategies (e.g., Oxford, 1990)
- Language learning motivation (e.g., Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Williams & Burden, 1997)
- Language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986)

Carroll, J. & Sapon, S. (1959). *Modern Language Aptitude Test*. New York: The Psychological Corporation.

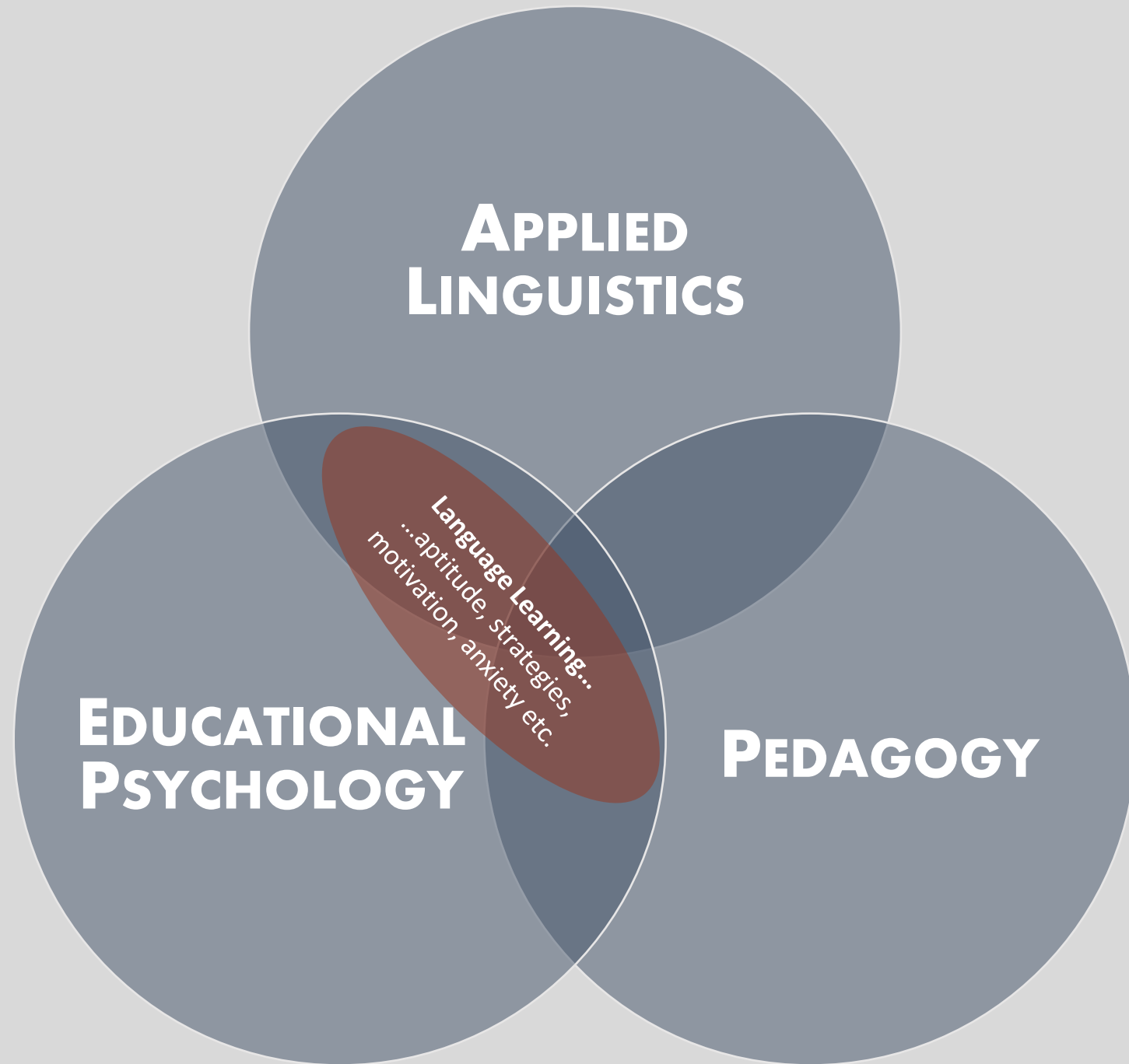
Gardner, R. & Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Horwitz, E.K., Horwitz, M.B. & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.

Oxford, R.L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Williams, M. & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge: CUP.

Connections to ELT



A black and white photograph of a desk. In the foreground, several metal paper clips are scattered on a dark surface. In the background, a small, rectangular sign is visible, though its text is illegible. The lighting is soft, creating subtle shadows.

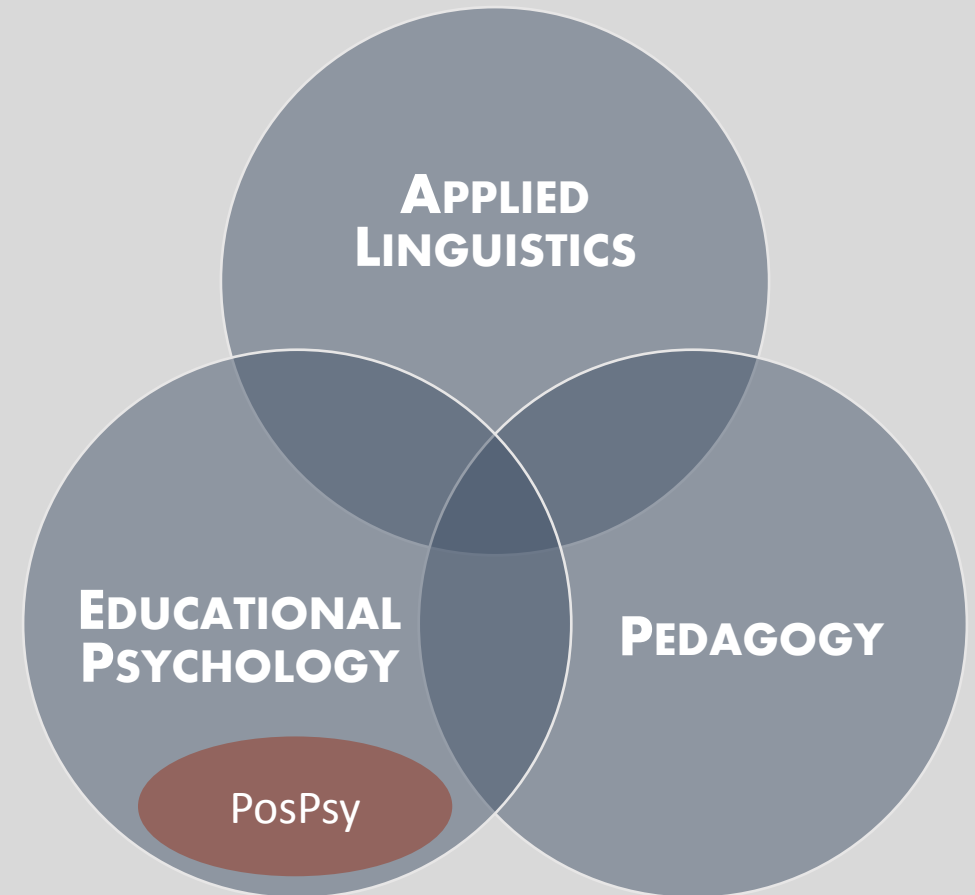
Examples of disconnectedness (2): Positive psychology

- PosPsy involves the study of positive emotions and strengths of character, and – for our purposes – their implications for language teaching and learning.
- Reaction to two perceived problems in psychology:
 - Emphasis on mental illness, rather than strengths
 - ‘Unscientific’ methods (e.g., case studies, qualitative methods)
- Increasingly applied to optimise the effectiveness of organisations (→ schools)

Relation to ELT

- When applied to language learners, PosPsy looks into constructs such as:
 - Hope
 - Flow
 - Enjoyment
- When applied to language teachers, it looks into constructs like:
 - Empathy
 - Resilience
 - Emotional labour

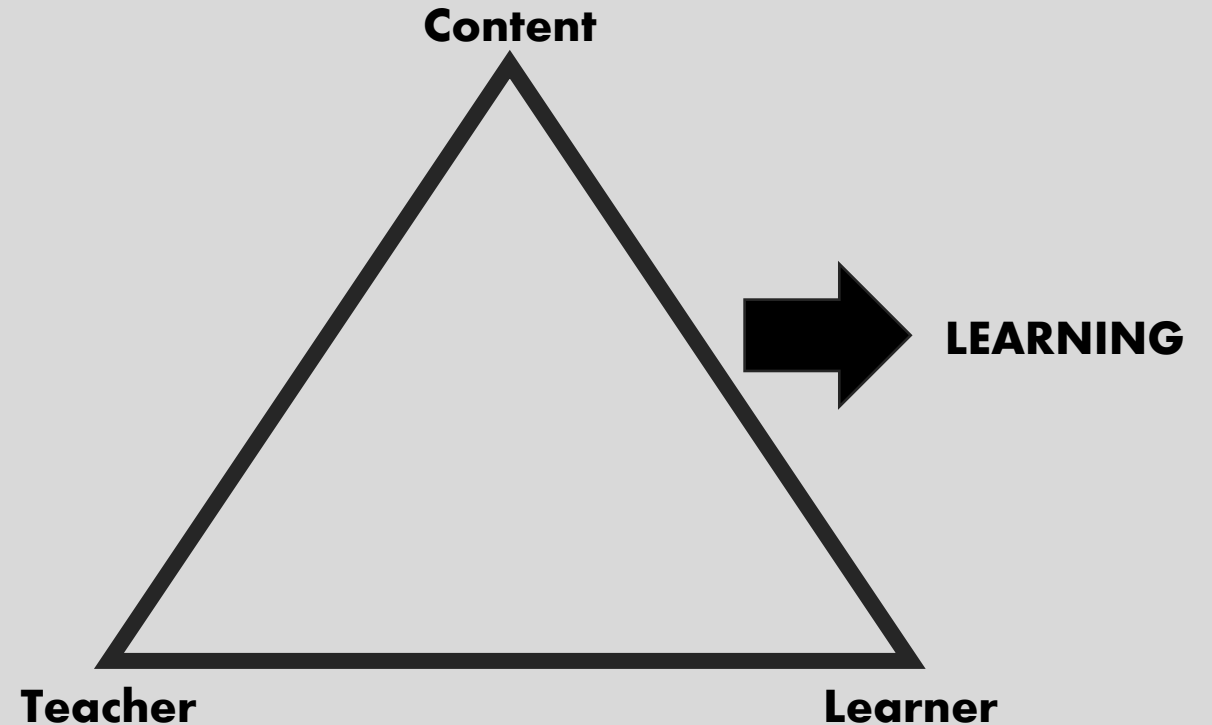
These offer useful insights into the psychology of teachers and learners. Links to language teaching and learning need to be forged.



Psychological repositioning

Language learning is a relational process. Bearing this in mind, language learning psychology can provide valuable insights about:

- The relations between learner & content / target language;
- The relations between teacher & content / target language;
- The relations between learners & teacher;
- How all the above relate to learning.



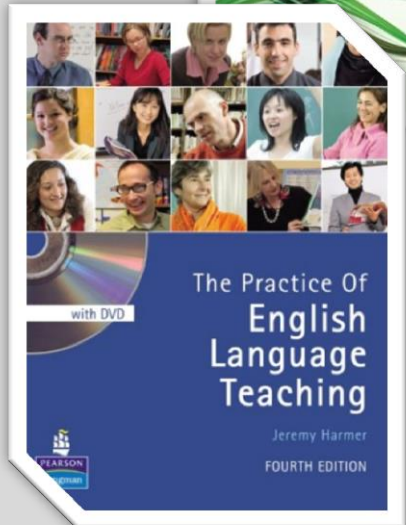
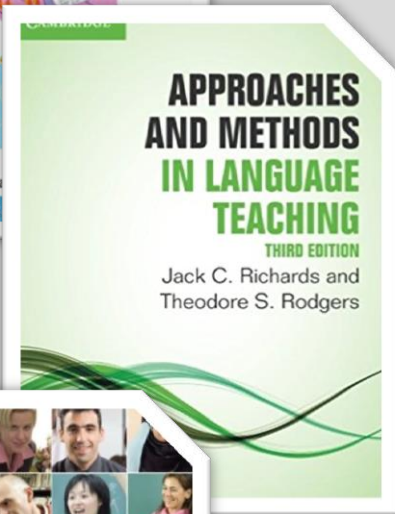
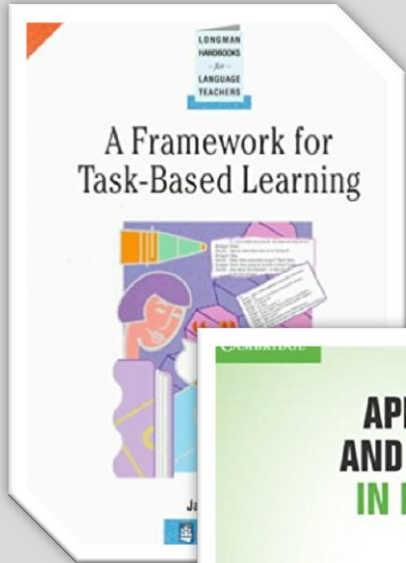
Rethinking Pedagogy



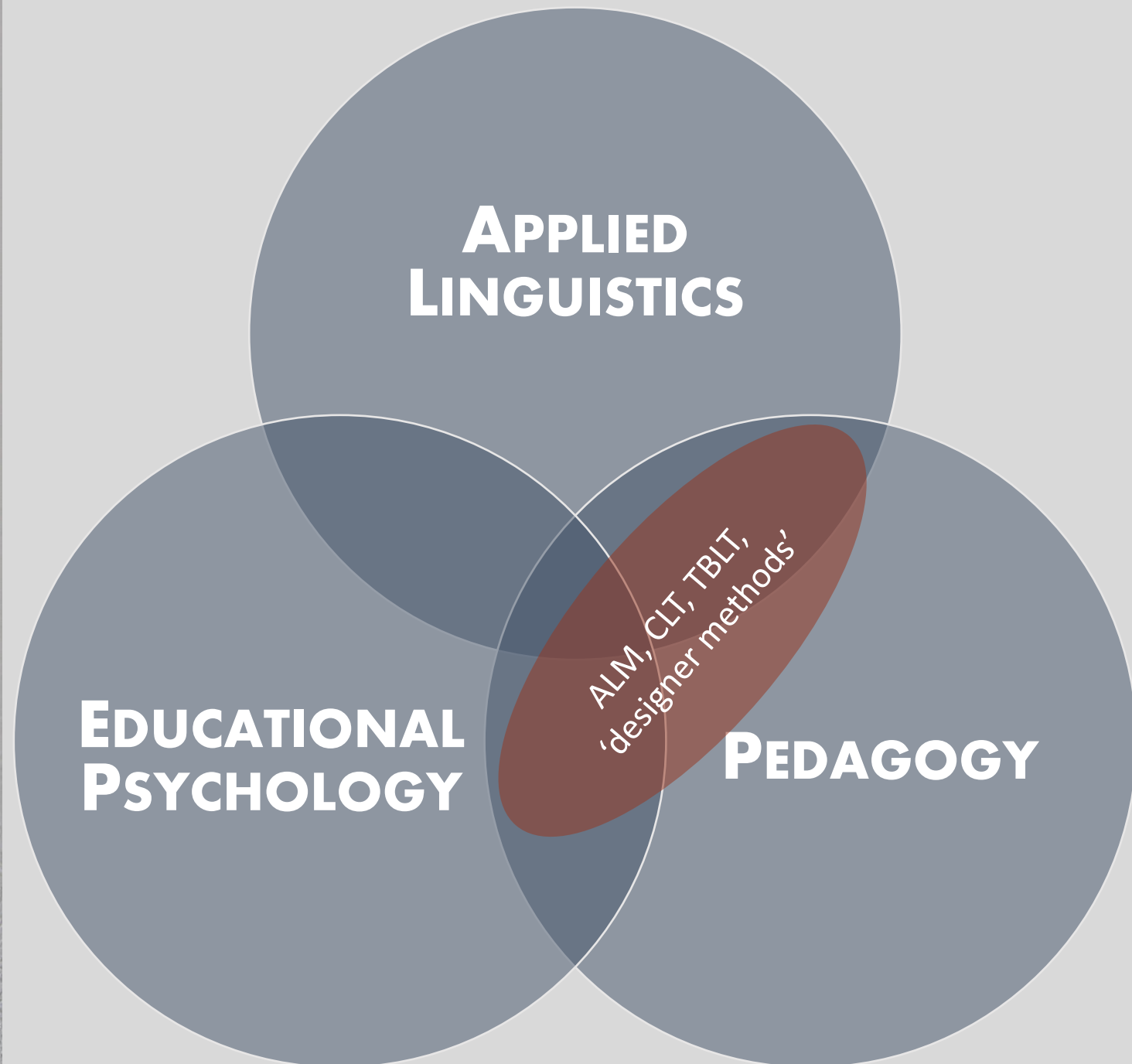
Approaches & methods

Multiple theoretical & practical proposals, in search for the 'best' way to teach, e.g.:

- Audiolingual method;
- The methods movement(s);
- Communicative language teaching;
- Task-based learning and teaching...



Connections to ELT



A black and white photograph of a desk. In the foreground, several metal paper clips are scattered on a dark surface. In the background, a small, rectangular sign is visible, though its text is illegible. The lighting is soft, creating subtle shadows.

Examples of disconnectedness (3): Self-Organised Learning

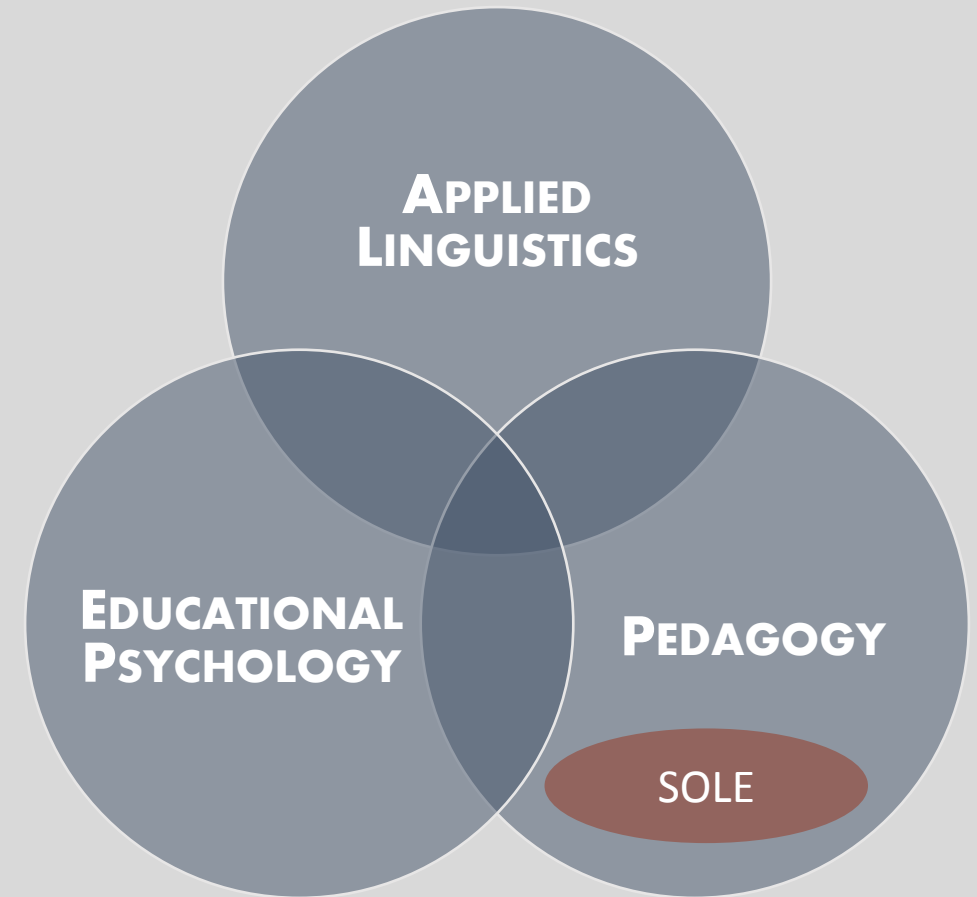
- Self-organised learning (SOLE) involves learning without a school / teacher.
- “Hole in the Wall” experiments: children in developing countries with access to internet were claimed to be able to learn ‘almost anything’ (e.g., Mitra et al., 2016).
- “minimally invasive education” claimed to be pedagogically more effective, and financially more efficient than formal teaching (Mitra & Rana, 2001).

Mitra, S., Kulkarni, S. & Stanfield, J. (2016) Learning at the Edge of Chaos—Self-Organising Systems in Education. In Lees, H. (ed.) *The Palgrave International Handbook of Alternative Education* (pp. 227-239). Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Mitra, S., & Rana, V. (2001). Children and the Internet: Experiments with minimally invasive education in India. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 32(2), 221-232.

Relation to ELT

- Implications for first-world countries: educational technology upgraded from an ancillary role to a prime driver of instruction.
- Part of broader discourse devaluing teachers; cf. the claim that ‘teacher effects’ predict learning outcomes less well than ‘peer learning’ (or even ‘pre-term birth weight’!) (Hattie, 2009)
- Build connections or challenge this link?



Pedagogical repositioning

Post-method pedagogy postulates that teaching should be based on general principles (which we believe to be universal), but that the best way to enact them differs depending on context (Holliday, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

This suggests a need for:

- a) Theoretical debate to establish what general principles should guide our teaching and learning
- b) Empirical research to establish contextually appropriate ways in which these principles can be put in practice.

Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

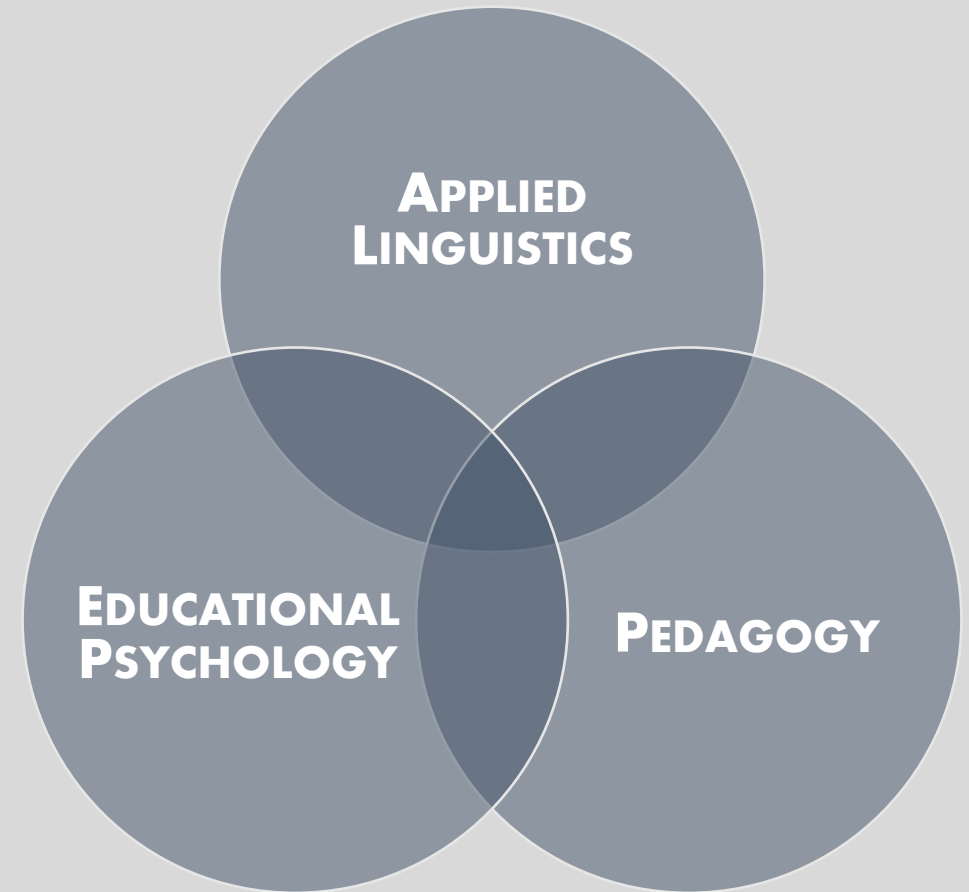
Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*. London: Routledge.

Bringing
it all
together



Finding our place to stand

- ELT is an interdisciplinary field.
- ELT is draws eclectically from adjacent disciplines like Applied Linguistics, Educational Psychology and Pedagogy.
- ELT is firmly located at the common ground shared by the informing disciplines and the needs of the profession: language teaching and learning.



Some caveats

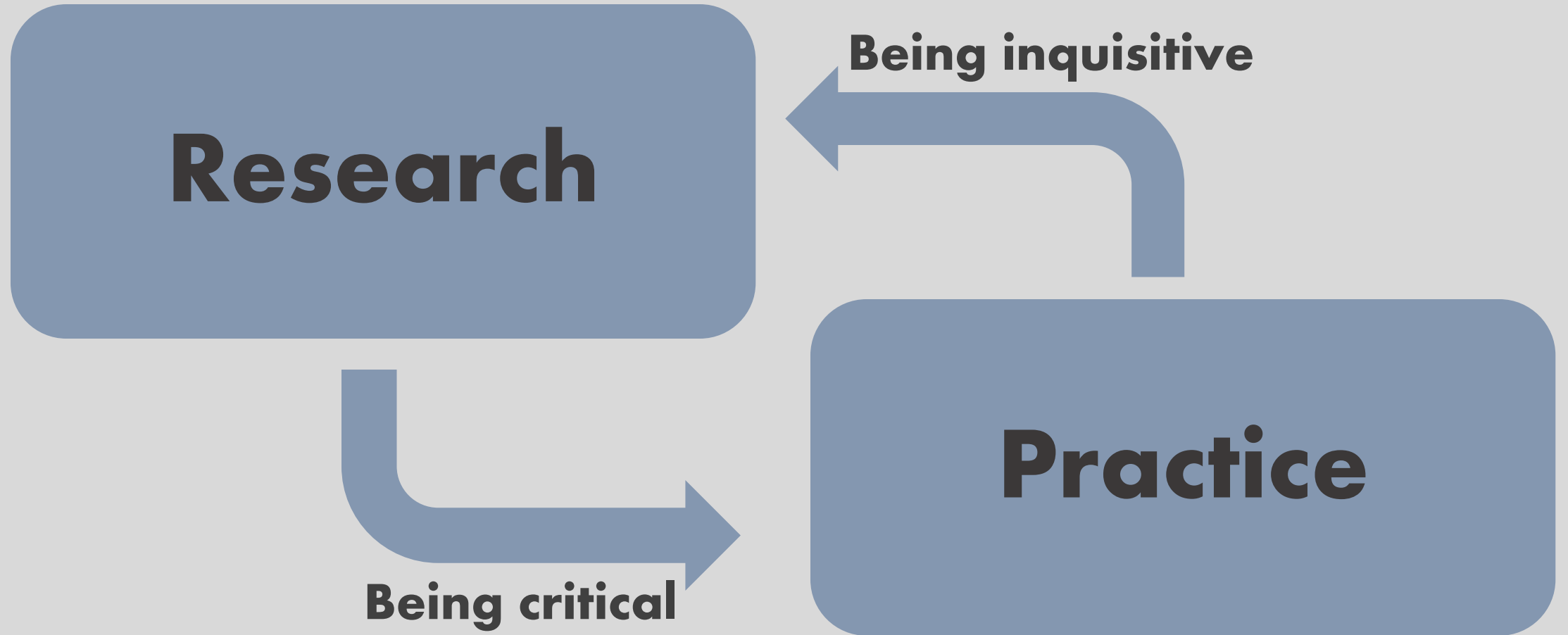
The examples of 'disconnectedness' are:

- Not monolithic: Some research in these strands will connect to ELT better than other.
- Not static: Research insights that do not obviously connect to ELT at the moment of their inception can be **made** relevant.



How?

Building connections



Being critical

As professionals, we need to be up-to-date with theoretical and empirical developments.

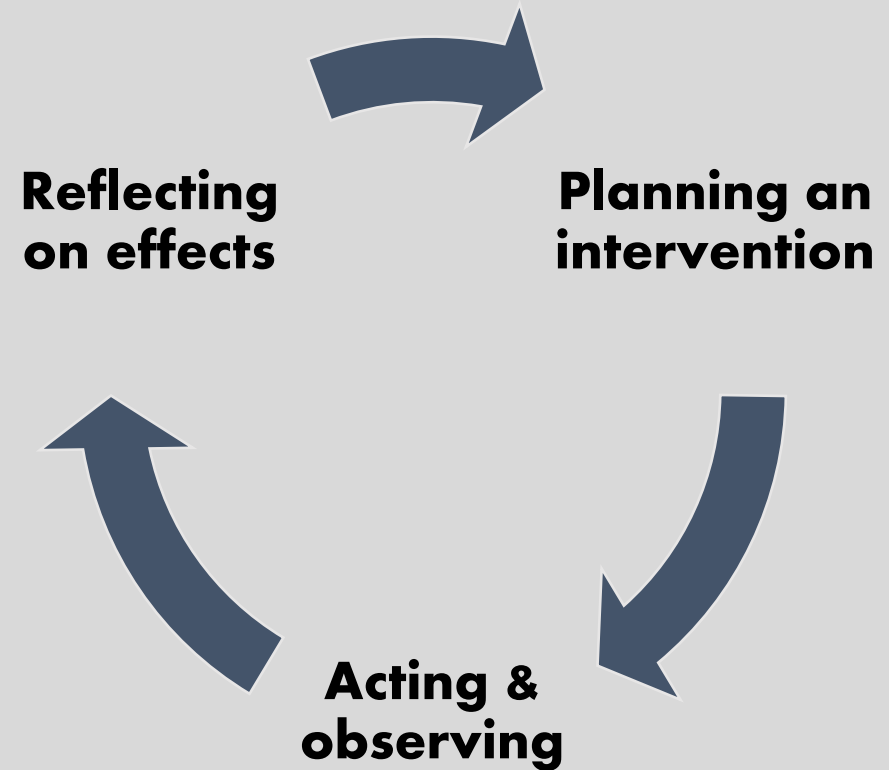
But these need to be put to the test of **critical evaluation**.

Criteria

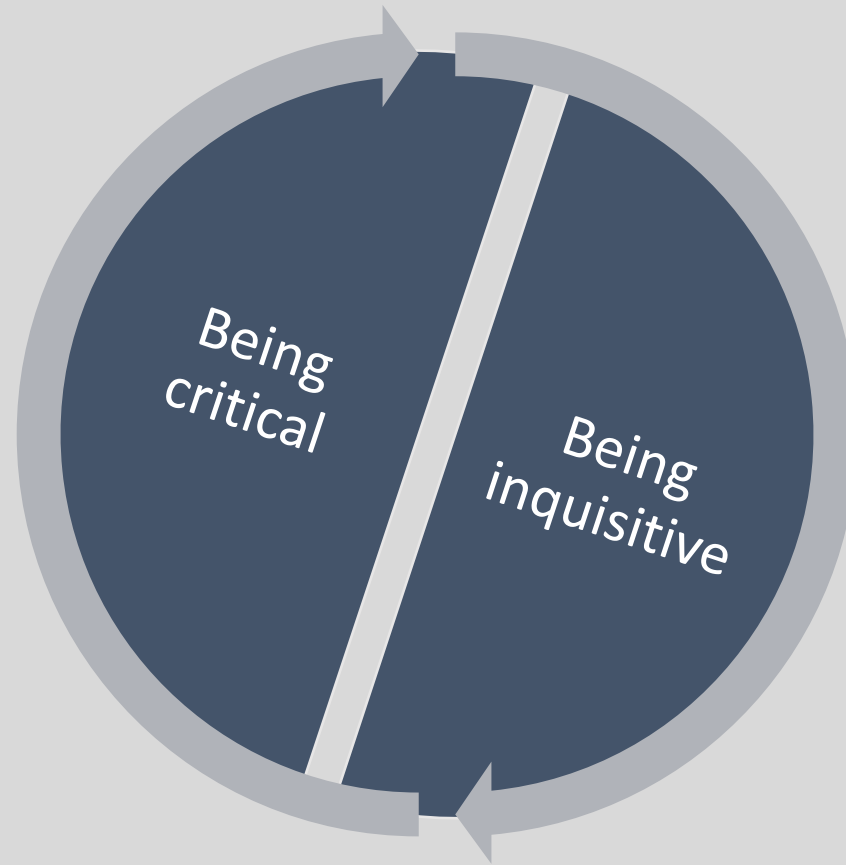
- **Usefulness**
- **Explicitness & clarity**
- **Coherence**
- **Comprehensiveness**
- **Simplicity**
- **Verifiability**

Being inquisitive

- Move beyond the ‘what works best?’ question. We need to think ‘what works best in my situation?’
- Need for situated classroom-based inquiry, to establish best practices for our needs and the needs of our students



ELT praxis as connection



Thank you!



Questions or Comments? → achillefs.kostoulas@uni-graz.at ♦ [@achilleask](#)