Take 1, Take 2, Take 3: A suggested three-stage approach to exploratory practice

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INTRODUCTION

Dick Allwright's reflections (2003, and this volume) on the history of applied linguistics ties in with the work of many through the years who have tried to understand language learning and teaching from the perspective of the participants. In order to obtain student perspectives on classroom interaction, much recent research has been carried out using diary and journal studies (Jarvis, 1992; Wiener & Rosenwald, 1993; Numrich, 1996; Richards & Ho, 1998; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999); peer observation (Richards, 1998; Crookes, 2003; Tsui, 2003); stimulated recall (Calderhead *et al.*, 1981; Burns, 1996; Gass & Mackey, 2000); private speech (Saville-Troike, 1988; De Guerrerro, 1994, 1999; Lantolf, 1997; Broner & Tarone, 2001; Barnard, 2003).

Important as gaining a rich understanding of student perspectives is, part of our approach is to do some analysis when the perspectives of all the actual participants are not possible. Of course students can use our approach just as well as teachers, teacher trainers or researchers. In fact, a central goal of our approach is to support Allwright's decades-long attempt to show that all of these roles are overlapping. (1983; 1988 and Allwright and Bailey 1991). Students who explore classroom interaction are researchers just as teachers or researchers or teacher trainers who investigate classrooms. And as researchers share their results with others they are of course teachers, and those who use exploratory practice as part of their regular planning of classes are teacher trainers – for they are training themselves. We hope that as we illustrate a three-stage approach to exploratory practice, many who identify themselves with one label will see that all of us can use multiple labels to describe our roles.

In this chapter, in addition to our primary goal of speaking to Allwright's point 6, *from academics to practitioners as the knowledge-makers in the field*, we deal with a second goal: moving from the one-dimensional interpretations of teaching practice that are so prevalent in the field. To reach this goal, we address two of Allwright's other points: 1, *from prescription to description to understanding* and 2, *from simplicity to complexity* (Allwright, 2003, pp.1-5).. We address the first, second and sixth points by introducing a three-stage approach to exploratory practice.

In the first stage of our approach, **Take 1, recreating interaction** we select and prepare transcripts from our own or published sources which are intended to highlight a particular problem or issue that has arisen in the classroom. **Take 2, reflection on action**, comprises three steps. In step 1, we interpret the transcript from an '-emic' perspective –i.e., with an insider's knowledge of significant contextual features such as the background of the students, the teacher's aim, the actual setting etc. In steps 2 and 3, we make alternative interpretations with no knowledge of the contextual features (that is, an

‘-etic’ perspective), and by applying different theoretical perspectives from that taken by the original interpreter. In **Take 3, reconstructing for action**, we compare the three perspectives in Take 2 in order to generate an alternative classroom plan, with a view to dealing with the issue more effectively in our own professional practice.

The idea is that we might then repeat the three stages - Take 1, 2 and 3 - on this reconstructed classroom plan after it has been put into practice. We have two ultimate goals: first to understand our teaching and our students’ learning more deeply, in Allwright's words moving "from prescription to description to understanding" (point 1) and moving" from simplicity to complexity (point 2) and, second, to realize the overlapping roles we play as teachers, students, researchers and teacher trainers - Allwright's point 6: "from academics to practitioners as the knowledge-makers in the field."

We will demonstrate the three-stage approach - our three ‘takes - with two published transcripts: **Painting and a box** from Richard-Amato (1988; 1996) and **Carlos's trousers** from Long (1980). We will invite you to apply the three-stage approach with **Hats and ties**, an excerpt from Fanselow (1977b).

Painting and a box

Transcript 1, Take 1 Recreating interaction

We have selected the following extract, published in a methodology book (Richard-Amato, 1988; 2nd edition, 1996), which seeks to illustrate the issue of the negotiation of meaning between teacher and learner. Although this is not made explicit, it may be assumed that Richard-Amato was aware of the specific features of the context in order to make her interpretation.

1. S: I throw it—box. (Points to a box on the floor.)
2. T: You threw the box?
3. S: No, I threw in the box.
4. T: What did you throw in the box?
5. S: My. . .I paint...
6. T: Your painting?
7. S: Painting?
8. T: You know.. . painting. (Makes painting movements on an imaginary paper.)
9. S: Yes, painting.
10. T: You threw your painting in the box.
11. S: Yes, I threw my painting in box.

(Richard-Amato, 1988, p. 40)

Transcript 1, Take 2 Recreating interaction, Step 1: an emic perspective

Based on her understanding of Krashen's (1982; 1985) notion of i+1, Richard-Amato (1988, p.40) suggests that the transcribed episode illustrates the negotiation of meaning because it has the following characteristics of comprehensible input: i. the words refer to the immediate environment; ii. the vocabulary and structures are simple; iii. there is a lot of repetition; iv. acting or gestures - pointing to objects, for example - are used to illustrate meanings; v. attention is given to the meaning of what is said and not to the form - there is no explicit comment about the incorrect tense in line 1, for example. Also, if we listened to a recording of the teacher's speech, we would probably find that it was delivered at a slower than usual pace, with some exaggeration and pauses, features of 'motherese' and 'foreigner talk', to which Richard-Amato had earlier referred (1988, p.36 and p.39).

According to the author (Richard-Amato, 1988, p. 40), these characteristics are sufficient to enable meaning to be negotiated by collaboration between a teacher and a learner, although she notes that it would take a lot more comprehensible input containing the grammatical features before they could be firmly acquired.

Transcript 1, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 2: a first etic perspective

An experienced teacher was asked to comment on the 'Painting' transcript in terms of the setting and participants, the intentions of the participants and the extent to which, and how, mutual understanding is achieved.

I can think of two possible contexts: one in a school classroom in which a teacher was interacting with a young learner, and the other a home setting where an adult (perhaps a mother) was talking to a small child. I infer the age of the child by fact that s/he was talking about a painting in a box, a typical activity for young children, and – more significantly, by the limited language being used or expressed by the child. I think the former scenario is more probable, but in either case an adult was probably scaffolding the child in a wider zone of proximal development – so as to enable the latter to move from his present developmental level to a higher one.

It is difficult to be certain about the participants' intentions as there are no clues about the discourse which immediately preceded the child's first utterance. It could be, for example, that the adult asked a question such as 'What did you do?' or 'Where did you put the painting?' Alternatively, the child could have initiated the interaction by simply informing the adult of what he had done. I think the latter is more likely, as the following exchanges indicate that the adult seemed to want to find out what the child wanted to say – and also to provide a grammatically correct model, to which the child eventually approximated. I think the child's intention was to tell the adult what he had done (with the limited linguistic resources at his command).

It seems to me that mutual understanding did occur but was limited by the child's speech or vocabulary knowledge. To compensate for this, both the child and the teacher used gestures to support or convey the 'missing' meaning of words that the child did not know or understand. The child, I noticed, did not immediately know how to say the word painting, and when corrected, did not initially understand the word until some additional information about the meaning of the word painting was supplied. In this case, the teacher made painting movements on imaginary paper to support the meaning of the word painting. This can also be said for the child's first sentence in discussing what was thrown into the box. The child omitted the words *in the*, but supported his lack of speech with action to help convey his meaning. He pointed at the box. The teacher responded by asking if it was thrown in the box. So – a limited amount of meaning was shared, but was restricted by the child's speech or vocabulary knowledge.

Transcript 1, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 3: a second etic interpretation

One way to remind ourselves of Allwright's point 1, "from prescription to description to understanding," point 2 "from simplicity to complexity", and point 6 "from academics to practitioners as the knowledge-makers in the field" is to turn each characteristic into a null hypothesis. Thus, since Richard-Amato's first characteristic is "the words refer to the immediate environment" (1988, p. 40), we need to find examples of words in the lines that do not refer to the immediate environment. Some of the words that seem not to refer to the immediate environment are *it* (line 1) and *the,* (line 2, 3, 4 and 10), *no,* (line 3), *what,* (line 4), *did,* (line 4), and *yes,* (line 9).

The word *it,* in line 1, by its nature, can refer to anything – including places close to us in the immediate environment, or far away in a different environment. Although the student seems to be using *it* in the first line to refer to something close at hand, the teacher seems not to notice the word *it* itself, much less what it might refer to in the immediate environment. Even at line 10, she[1] seems not to realize that *it* in line 1 in fact could be grouped with words that refer to the immediate environment. She seems not to realize that *it* might have been used to refer to the painting - close at hand - in the first line of the exchange.

Had she considered the painting to be close at hand, there would be no reason for making painting movements on an imaginary paper in line 8. Nor would there by any reason for her to say *Your painting?* in line 6. It is only in line 10 when she says *You threw your painting in the box* that she seems to realize that there has been a painting in the immediate environment from the beginning. Had she considered the painting to be in the immediate environment, she would have looked in the box and seen it, at line 6, when she asks, *Your painting?* Instead, she tries to illustrate the meaning of the action of painting in line 8. Moreover, the painting movements on an imaginary piece of paper seem not to take into account the fact that since the student introduced the word *paint* in

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[1] For the sake of convenience, hereafter the student is always referred to as 'he' and teacher as 'she'.

line 5, he not only probably knows what *paint* means, but is trying to indicate that there is an actual painting in the immediate environment.

Ironically, even the word *box* which, when first mentioned in line 1, is pointed to by the student, and thus obviously and literally close at hand, is not treated by the teacher as if it is in the immediate environment. Her question in line 2 *You threw the box?* would be unnecessary if she considered the box to be in the immediate environment. She could have seen if it had been thrown, either by its size and weight or the way it was resting on the floor or table. Various questions might race through our mind if we considered the box in the environment where we could see it - for example: 'Is the box the student just mentioned upright? Is the box he just mentioned on its side with the contents spilled? Is anything in the box? Is the box he mentioned too large to be thrown or so small that if thrown it would be broken?'

Transcript 1,Take 3: Reconstructing for action

In **Take 3 reconstructing for action**, having now compared the three perspectives, we can suggest a range of alternative courses for the teacher to take to more efficiently co-construct the intended meaning of the student's first utterance in line 1. Faced with the seemingly incomprehensible input of *I throw in - box*, there are a number of alternatives to the paraphrase in line 2. It seems that the teacher was not attending closely to the student: she apparently did not notice that the student was pointing to the box, nor did she listen to the word *it* in the student's utterance, and the significant pause that followed.

Rather than paraphrasing, the teacher might look in the box and then ask a close-ended question such as 'Did you throw your painting in the box?' It is of course, possible that the box contains other items as well, but in this case the teacher might select one of these for her question. Were she to do this, she would reduce the range of choices and, by simplifying the student's task, negotiate meaning perhaps more efficiently. If she wants to engage the student's mental and verbal processing more directly, she might write what the student said on the board; and then ask him to look at it and add some words; alternatively, the student could write what he has said on a piece of paper, or even draw what he wants to say, as a stimulus for a more protracted negotiation. Since the teacher does not understand the referent for *it*, she might say 'Touch it' or 'Give it to me', thereby directing the student to actually foreground the key element in the immediate environment.

It is often the case that when teachers do not understand something said by their students, they will say something like 'Again, please'. A similar recast here by the teacher, preceded by and indeed followed by a significant wait time, would clearly indicate to the student that a verbal reformulation would be helpful.

Assuming that the original dialogue had continued, at line 4 the teacher might have asked a close-ended question rather than the open-ended *What did you throw in the box?* As indicated above, this would have simplified the student's task, and also avoided the unnecessary diversion into the word 'painting', the meaning of which (despite the

teacher's gesture in line 8) the student evidently understood. Rather than negotiating or co-constructing meaning, this exchange (lines 5-8) merely suggests that the teacher is confounding the issue, and creating a problem where none seems to exist.

It is clear that in the irreducible complex reality of any classroom, a teacher has to make many executive decisions very rapidly, and cannot be expected to call to mind a wide range of possible courses of action and then reflect **in** action on which of them might be most appropriate in the particular circumstances. This obvious point merely highlights the benefits of reflection **on** action – the *a posteriori* consideration of how alternative courses of action derived from general principles might enhance our understanding of classroom interaction. Then, by choosing from various alternatives, we may enhance our classroom practice in a subsequent similar interaction – reflection **for** action.

Carlos's trousers

Transcript 2 ,Take 1 Recreating interaction

We have selected the following extract, which, according to Long (1980, 14) illustrates how, through interaction with students, a teacher re-asserts authority after it appears to be threatened.

1. T: ...OK? Chemical pollution. OK.
2. S4: (yawning) O o o.
3. T: Trousers! Alright. Carlos (S4), do you wear trousers?
4. S4: Alway...All my life.
5. SS: (laughter)
6. T: Always. You've worn, I have...
7. S4: Eh wear wear (inaudible).
8. T: I have... well do you wear trousers?
9. SS: I wear.
10. SS: I wear, I wear.
11. S4: Yes, I I do.
12. T: Yes, you do. What's how do you say that word?
13. S4: Trousers.
14. T: Trous*ers*.
15. S4: Trous*ers*.
16. T: *Trous*ers.
17. S: Trous*ers*.
18. S3: Trousers.
19. T: Mm hm. Have you got trousers on?
20. S3: Yes, I have.
21. T: What kind?
22. S3: Jeans.
23. T: Jeans... Say the word jeans. Jeans.
24. S3: Jeans.

25. T: Jeans.
26. S2: Jeans.
27. T: Jeans.
28. S1: Jeans.
29. T: OK.OK. Huh! Does anyone need an ashtray?

(Long, 1980, pp.13- 14)

Transcript 2, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 1: an emic perspective

Long (1980, p. 14) makes the assumption that the teacher takes Carlos's yawning to be a manifestation of boredom, rather than fatigue – and an indirect challenge to the value of the lesson. In reaction to the hilarity occasioned by Carlos's joking response to the teacher's odd question about his trousers in line 3, the teacher seeks to maintain control by drilling the pronunciation of a couple of items: *I wear* and *trousers*.

Long wonders why the teacher asked the students to repeat the form *I wear* (lines 9, 10), which is not a structurally accurate response to *Do you wear trousers?* And when Student 4 said *trousers* in 13, Long says that on the tape the word is correctly pronounced. Why then the teacher's repetition tasks? Long claims that the teacher was behaving "not unlike a sergeant-major who, catching some unruly recruits in an act of disobedience, attempts to break their spirit with a dose of 'square-bashing' on the barracks parade-ground" (1980, p. 14). Thus the purpose of the repetition tasks is not to practise language, but to re-establish order. And, again, what purpose is served by repeating incorrect responses to a question *I wear* (lines 9 and 10) in response to *Do you wear trousers?* (line 8) and repeating a word Student 4 had in fact said correctly in line 13? The only purpose, Long believes, is the establishment of control by the teacher.

Further evidence that the purpose in the exchange is control rather than practice or language learning comes from lines 19 and 20 when another student is able to respond correctly to a yes/no question: *Have you got trousers on? - Yes, I have.* Still further evidence that the purpose in the exchange is other than teaching language comes from lines 24 to 28 when the teacher is again asking students to repeat individual words out of context: there is no evidence to show they cannot say *jeans* correctly either individually or in meaningful phrases or sentences. Long (1980, p.15) says a key reason that they are being docile is that the teacher has reestablished order by insisting requesting that the students repeat words they in fact have no difficulty with.

The main reason for Long's claim that the purpose of the exchange is for the teacher to reestablish control rather than to practise language is to show that instruments designed for interaction analysis would miss this underlying purpose (1980, p. 15). Later, in Take 2, Step 3, we will suggest that there are ways in which at least one particular instrument could in fact produce the same, or even a richer interpretation.

Transcript 2, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 2: a first etic perspective

Long's extract can be viewed in the way that Richard-Amato explains the negotiation of meaning. The teacher’s reaction to Carlos’s yawning sets off a chain of events in which teacher and students collectively, though implicitly, reach an understanding. It is not at all clear why the teacher should begin this negotiation of meaning by a reference to the student’s trousers, but in Richard-Amato’s framework, the words do tie the medium of language to concrete objects in the immediate environment, thereby realising an important criterion of Krashen’s (1985) notion of i+1 - that is, input just above the learner’s present knowledge. Similarly, both syntactical structures and the vocabulary are simple, with the key words very frequently repeated by both the teacher and the students. There is no verbal evidence of acting or gestures to clarify meanings, although it may be assumed that turn-taking and cueing are accompanied by appropriate eye contact and probably some form of gesture, such as pointing.

Very little attention is paid to syntactical form - for example, the teacher does not heed the awkward responses in lines 9 and 10; indeed, in this extract the students are expected to say no more than one or two words. However, the teacher does pay attention to the phonological form of the words – the pronunciation of the word *trousers* – but there is no explicit explanation of how the words should be pronounced. The chain of repetition of this word and *jeans* concludes with the teacher’s final acknowledgement *OK. OK*, which suggests that mutual understanding has been achieved, a topic boundary reached, and a new phase of the lesson is about to begin.

The identification of another object in the immediate environment (an ashtray) suggests that the tenets of comprehensible input are about to be activated. All of this would suggest that communication is successful because the input is comprehensible. But what has been understood? Surely not the meaning of trousers and jeans, nor the revelation that the students wear them, nor that the words are pronounced in certain ways. What appears to be the case is that the teacher has used a familiar language-teaching routine (‘listen and repeat’) implicitly to convey a meaningful message concerned with how classroom interaction should occur – by manifestly listening to the teacher. Since this message has never been made explicit, understanding must have been co-constructed by means other than that of direct, comprehensible input. In order to interpret this, we need another angle of vision.

Transcript 2, Take 2 Reflection on action Step 3: a second etic perspective

The extract can also be considered in the light of an interactional coding instrument. The fact that on one level the teacher in the transcript about trousers follows some of the features of negotiated meanings that Richard-Amato notes (1988) does not detract from Long’s interpretation. But Long’s claim that his “understanding of the extract would not be captured by an instrument designed for interaction analysis” (1980, p.15) is open to question. He notes that many instruments provide for multiple coding (1980, p.6), but to support his claim that instruments could not capture the interpretation he makes, he fails to take note of the richness of instruments that provide for multiple

coding. He says that an interaction instrument would simply be coded "something like "**T** asks question-**S** responds—**T** models—**S** responds, etc. . ." (1980, p.15)

If we used the categories in FOCUS (Fanselow, 1977a; 1987), we could in fact show an interpretation of the transcript richer than Long's interpretation. FOCUS notes five characteristics of communication. In the 1980 article which contains the excerpt with Carlos, Long notes the first characteristic, source of the communication (p. 15). And he mentions the second, whether a task is being set or performed. And he touches on the third characteristic when he refers to models (p. 15). In FOCUS, modeling is a characteristic called "use: ways mediums are used" (1977a, p. 25) and includes providing models. But the two characteristics of FOCUS that would clearly lead to the same interpretation Long has made are first, the medium of communication used and secondly, the content of the communication.

The yawning in line 2 would be coded as a paralinguistic medium of communication that can be seen and heard. And the content of the yawning would have to be coded in three ways: either as the expression of personal feelings—part of the category of content called LIFE; or the expression of some form of classroom behavior, part of the category of content called PROCEDURE; or the expression of some language point to be learned, part of the category called LANGUAGE. It seems clear that the student is not yawning to demonstrate the meaning of the word, as there is no mention of the word in the exchange. Thus, LANGUAGE is eliminated as a coding category that could fit. Moreover, since the teacher does not ask about the reason for the yawn with a question such as 'Did you go to a party last night?' the teacher does not treat the yawn personal experience, a sub-category of LIFE. So we are left with the category PROCEDURE. And one of the subcategories of PROCEDURE is classroom social behaviour, which of course can be positive, negative or neutral. In this instance, it seems to be negative and would be so coded.

Once a coder determined that the initial exchange was dealing with inappropriate classroom behavior, the coding of the content of the subsequent lines would be done with this interpretation in mind. When the teacher has the students repeat the words, the repetition would be double coded. It would perhaps be coded LANGUAGE, subcategory pronunciation. But it would also have to coded PROCEDURE, subcategory classroom social behavior. Since the students tend to get the language right in their repetitions, another meaning has to be considered for the repetition of the words. And given the coding of the opening lines as PROCEDURE, classroom social behavior, it seems reasonable to interpret the subsequent lines in the same way.

Once two or three independent coders finished their coding and came together to compare their coding, they could negotiate any disagreements. If of course the coders agreed on the coding, then no negotiation would be needed. But in coding systems with multiple categories, disagreements tend to happen. And one of the values of multiple category systems, especially one like FOCUS with many subcategories, is that one person tends to pick up something another misses.

So while Long argues that his "understanding of the extract would not be captured by an instrument designed for interaction analysis" (1980, p. 15) we are claiming that by using existing characteristics of communications and categories and subcategories to apply to data, those interpreting the data have both a framework and a set of options that can be used to richly interpret interaction. Though Long states that FOCUS has 73 categories—the highest of any he lists—in fact, each communication is coded with a minimum of five characteristics. Thus by using the categories in combination we can code thousands of distinct communications, not just a few score. By providing many lenses, FOCUS allows multiple facets with which to interpret data in a wide range of ways and is designed to stimulate exploratory talk - not merely to label or categorize communications.

Without any categories, people new to exploration of their own teaching, or that of others, would have little direction. But categories not only provide direction – where to look—but a way to focus discussion of the data and provide a taxonomy within which the interpretation can be made – a point emphasized by Allwright (1988, p. 56 & 242). 'Is the teacher developing language, or controlling students, or having a personal conversation?' is the sort of question that the category CONTENT would stimulate. 'Is the yawn, or smile or raised finger being used to teach a gesture, words that name gestures, cultural content, or something having to do with classroom behaviour and procedures?' These types of questions which the categories in FOCUS are designed to stimulate have been used to produce many types of interpretations in addition to the one that Long has made of the Carlos' s trousers transcript.

Transcript 2, Take 3 Reconstructing for action

Whether we interpret this transcript using a systematic coding system, or theoretical perspectives, or insights from our experience or - what is usually the case - some combination of all three, we are unlikely to further our professional development unless we generate alternative practices—reconstructing **for** action.

So let us provide alternatives we can use in our classes to the 'sergeant-major approach' drilling to reassert our authority (Long, 1980, p.14). If we were using FOCUS, we would have a range of options in front of us. Publications by Fanselow (for example, 1977a and 1987) are filled with coding of interactions and suggestions for generating alternative interactions simply by substituting communications from different categories. As we said above, the content of the student's yawn in line 2 would be coded PROCEDURE, classroom social behavior. And the teacher/sergeant-major's call to Carlos to pay attention in line 3 (*Trousers!)* would be coded in the same way.

We can substitute either LIFE or STUDY OF LANGUAGE as the content of our communication after the student's yawn. An example of a communication in the category LIFE would be a personal comment or question, such as: 'Carlos, sorry, you seem tired. I feel tired too. Any others?' If in fact many students indicated that they were tired, the teacher could move from LIFE to PROCEDURE, classroom social behaviour,

in a positive rather than negative way by saying, for example, ‘Let’s take a short break. Let’s walk out in the hall to get our blood moving’.

Or, in line 3 we could substitute a different task. In FOCUS, there are five types of tasks: one to take in mediums by listening, reading silently, observing: *attend* (1) and four to produce mediums. In FOCUS, mediums can be produced to *characterize* (2) by commenting or categorizing, to *present* (3), by stating facts and answering questions the person asking knows the answer to, to *relate* (4*)*, by making inferences, speculating or giving original explanation or to *re-present* (5) by imitating, copying, writing a dictation, or paraphrasing. (Fanselow, 1977a, pp. 25-26).

The task Carlos is asked to do is to answer what is commonly called a display question, *present* (3*)* in FOCUS. He is asked to respond to a question to which the teacher, and in this case probably everyone in the class, knows the answer, and might be wondering why a question with such an obvious answer was uttered. One alternative would be to move from the category *present* (3) to *re-present* (5). ‘Those who are wearing new trousers raise your right hand; those who are wearing old trousers raise your left hand.’ As the direction indicates, the students are meant to show whether they comprehend by performing one of two actions, changing spoken words, objects, the trousers they are wearing, into an action. In this way, the experience of appropriate kinesic activity facilitates or reinforces the meaning being processed mentally and verbally.

Another task in the category, *re-present* (5), would be to ask the students to draw a pair of cool trousers and a pair of not so cool trousers, or make a list of the students who they thought had the coolest trousers. Both the teacher and the students could look at the sketches or the lists to see the extent to which they could build on their familiarity with various types of trousers to extend their vocabulary – comparison of colour, styles, materials, etc. Sketching or raising hands or drawing would provide a few seconds for the teacher to consider options to engage the class.

Returning to the content of communications, LANGUAGE has a dozen or more subcategories, one of which is pronunciation. With a list of subcategories on a chart in a class, a teacher could take a quick glance and see whether there were other aspects of language that could be dealt with other than pronunciation: word order, for example. By using the whiteboard dynamically, the teacher could indicate that she wanted the students to generate questions, either orally or in writing. Noting ’How’ and ’Who’ in one column and in another column dollar signs to indicate cost, in another column a sketch of trousers, a skirt and jeans, or the first initial of these words, as in the substitution table below, and a question mark at the end, as below.

A substitution tale for manipulating language

How many			$$$$		
	is	w		t	
	are		$$	s	?
Who				j	
			-$		

‘How many are wearing expensive/cheap/very expensive trousers/skirts/jeans?’ and ‘Who is wearing cheap/expensive/very expensive trousers/ skirts/ jeans?’ would be among the possibilities. Changing sketches into spoken or written words and forming the question pattern requires more concentration than repetition and at the same time would fulfill the teacher’s wish to regain control. But the first letter of the words requires more thinking than the words themselves. Some combination of sketches, symbols like the dollar sign and first letters would require the most mental processing.

HATS AND TIES

Transcript 3, Take 1 Recreating interaction

We have chosen the following extracts as they were discussed in an article on error correction (Fanselow, 1977b).

1. T: What are you holding? (expects student to tell him)
2. S: What are you holding?
3. T: The answer!

4. T: What material is this? (holding a tie)
5. S: Linen.
6. S: Wool.
7. S: Cotton.
8. T: It’s linen.

9. S: He holding hat.
10. T: Again.
11. S: She holding hat.
12. T: She?
13. S: holding…

14. T: It’s blue.
15. S1: It blue.
16. T: It’s blue.
17. S2: It’s blue.
18 . T: It’s blue.

19. S1: It blue.
20. T: It's blue.
21. S1: It blue.

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, step 1: an emic perspective

We provide Take 2, step 1 in the appendix and we suggest that before considering our insider's interpretation of this transcript, you, the reader, make your own, outsider's reflections based simply on what can be inferred from the transcript data. We hope that by your engagement with the data, you will experience the multiple roles that we are suggesting we all play and also have an opportunity to actually do what we are advocating.

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, step 2: a first etic perspective

Here, we invite you as a reader to actively engage in providing your own etic perspectives. Since one of our goals is to show how our roles as teacher, researcher, student and teacher trainer overlap, by inviting you as a reader to apply the three-stage approach to exploratory practice, we hope we can in this way demonstrate the importance of each of us seeing ourselves in multiple roles. In the appendix we provide Take 2, step 2), a first etic perspective you can compare with your own.

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, step 3: a second etic perspective

For step 3, we would like you to show the transcript (only) to a colleague and ask him/her to provide a second outsider's perspective. Again, we provide an alternative etic perspective in the appendix.

Transcript 3, Take 3 Reconstructing for action

We now invite you to attempt Take 3, Reconstructing for action. To do this, you can compare the takes written above with the emic and etic interpretations in the appendix. By doing so, you will help us reach our goal of showing the overlap in roles we all fill – Allwright's point 6: *moving from academics to practitioners as knowledge makers in the field*. It will also help us more fully attain our second goal: shifting from the one-dimensional interpretations of teaching practice which are so prevalent in the field – thus addressing Allwright's first and second points: *from prescription to description to understanding* and *from simplicity to complexity*.

CONCLUSION

Our aim in this chapter has been twofold: to emphasize our overlapping roles and the need for multiple interpretations of teaching practice rather than one-dimensional interpretations. We have also tried to show that it is more useful to analyze interactional data in order to illuminate classroom activity, than to prescribe effective ways of teaching - Allwright's first point: from prescription to description to understanding. And we have reminded ourselves that the one-dimensional interpretations that were part of some often quoted books and articles failed to take heed of Allwright's second point: from simplicity to complexity. Finally, we hope we have demonstrated the overlap between the various roles we each fulfill. We are neither teacher nor researcher nor teacher trainer nor student. We are all learners. We are all knowledge-makers. The divide between so-called academics and practitioners has been breaking down for years. We hope our three-stage approach can contribute to this useful deconstruction, as has Allwright's writing and teaching through the years. (1983; 1988 and Allwright and Bailey, 1991)

Central to our position is the view that multiple perspectives are needed in order to both describe and understand what occurs in classrooms. Thus, we have selected (Take 1) three short published extracts of interactions in very different classroom contexts. The reason why we chose to present and discuss published accounts is so that readers may locate the original works and thereby appreciate both the teaching context and the theoretical assumptions current at the time of writing. (In itself, this historical perspective should prove a salutary lesson in avoiding pedagogical prescription!) In Take 2, Reflection on action, each of the extracts has been examined from three different standpoints: those of the insider with an emic knowledge of the context, and two of outsiders informed by implicit or explicit theories of the nature of interaction and the negotiation of meaning. We have tried to show that none of these points of view is necessarily ‘correct’, and certainly not complete in itself, but each may provide a partial understanding of the interaction. In doing so, we provide a palimpsest of interpretation which may allow insights for the generation of ideas (Take 3, Reconstructing for action) for subsequent lesson planning in relatable situations. In short, we believe that analysis of classroom events is enriched by multiple perspectives and attention to both Allwright's first point - from prescription to description to understanding – and to his second - from simplicity to complexity. Our hope is that this approach illustrates how we might systematically reflect on, and for, action as part of our ongoing development as teachers, teacher trainers, classroom researchers – and learners.

We suggest that teachers periodically record some of their lessons. On occasion, it will appear that some of the classroom interactions are in some way significant. Why these particular events are salient may differ: an event may be selected because communication broke down and was then successfully repaired (or not!); it may be that –

at least on the surface – the communication was entirely successful, and the teacher/researcher/teacher trainer wishes to know why this was so; perhaps the event was significant because it developed in unexpected and interesting ways. For whatever reason, the teacher/researcher/teacher trainer (and students if the data is available for the students) thinks that the interaction could be worthy of closer investigation. Thus, the first step would be to listen to the recording and transcribe the particular interaction as accurately as possible (Take 1, Recreating interaction). Then, the teacher would analyze the extract from his/her own perspective, adding as much 'thick' description of the contextual features as possible – reflection **on** action (Take 2, Reflection on action, step 1: an emic perspective).

It would then be appropriate to show the transcript – with no other details – to a colleague, and ask him/her to write a paragraph or two, for example about what s/he can infer from the data about the setting and the participants, the intentions of student and teacher, and the extent to which, and how, mutual understanding is achieved (Take 2, Reflection on action step 2: a first etic perspective). In itself, this will provide an external point of view and a richer interpretation. However, we would argue that while two heads are better than one, this is not sufficient. The reason is that two standpoints may be seen as contrastive and oppositional, rather than complementary, thought provoking and heuristic (Fanselow, 1988; 1992). Therefore, it is extremely desirable to seek a third interpretation (Take 2, Reflection on action step 3, a second etic perspective), which could be obtained in various ways. For example, if the teacher is undergoing a formal programme of professional development, the third standpoint could be obtained from the course leader. Alternatively, if the teacher is taking independent responsibility for development, s/he could seek an interpretation from one of the many published explanations of classroom interaction, and apply a framework such as those we have illustrated in this chapter. It may be that the teacher has to hand an experienced analyst who could be approached for an informed interpretation. Having compared these various points of view, and considered the validity of each, the teacher is ready to reconstruct **for** action (Take 3) by envisaging a similar scenario and planning an appropriate course of action.

The ultimate step would be to repeat the three stages after recording the part of the lesson in which the refined plan was implemented. And for the teacher to invite interested parties (colleagues, teacher trainers, researchers and students) to engage in the three stages with the transcribed data.

Clearly, our proposed approach is not one recommended for everyday teaching! It is a painstaking, even laborious, process that requires detailed attention and a readiness to critique one's own position as well as those of others. Thus we suggest that it is a tool that can be used sparingly, but we believe effectively, to illuminate certain aspects of professional activity that the individual teacher/researcher/teacher trainer wishes to explore in some depth. As implied above, this approach would be a very useful component of a mentoring scheme, or indeed any formal programme of reflective professional development. In such an environment, teachers could be inducted into the process by an experienced analyst, and co-construct understanding and share

interpretations with other participants, thereby preparing themselves for autonomous investigation of their own particular teaching contexts. And at the same time researchers and teacher trainers would be engaged in the exploration of actual classroom interaction, which can only be understood by engagement in the exploration of day-to-day practices with the teachers involved. Our roles overlap as do the directions we all need to explore no matter what our official/assigned roles. In short, taking our cue from Dick Allwright, we need to move from prescription to description to understanding (point 1) and from simplicity to complexity (point 2) and from academics to practitioners as the knowledge-makers in the field (point 6). And equally importantly, we have to move from what we consider to be our primary role to other, complementary roles.

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Appendix

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, step 1: an emic perspective

The transcripts above were from a series of videotapes of lessons designed to teach adjective word order before a noun—color, material, object—in the pattern 'I'm/he's/she's/we're holding/wearing a. . . .'. A dozen of us used the same bag of materials: a yellow polyester tie, a blue felt fez, a black woolen beret, a white woolen hat, a blue woolen ski cap, and a red paper bag. We each had a copy of the same lesson plan. A key part of the lesson plan was the suggestion that each teacher draw vertical lines on the blackboard to show the slots or columns that were to be the focus of the lesson. The suggestion was also made that in the subject slots, stick figures be drawn rather than written pronouns to represent male and female.

The students in the classes were adults, aged from around eighteen to sixty. The classes were held in the evening two or three times a week for two hours per session. The adults paid a small fee to cover the cost of materials. The teachers had some experience and were in the process of completing their post-graduate degree in TESOL.

Although the purpose of the lesson was to enable the students to use the correct subject verb agreement in contractions and learn adjective word order before a noun, the intention of video taping the lessons and transcribing them was to describe how a dozen teachers treated errors during oral lessons. In the event, as the small sample of transcripts suggest, the teachers tended to focus on either color or material or object rather than adjective before a noun. And rather than practise the agreement between personal pronouns and *to be* in contractions, there was a lot of attention to the contraction *it's*.

Though the lesson plan was not followed, meaning some classes focused on colors, others on materials used to make hats, ties and bags, and others repeated the names of objects, there was an amazing similarity in how the teachers treated errors. This was in spite of the fact that there was nothing in the lesson plan or in the discussions before the lessons were taught about the treatment of error.

This result is similar to one Bellack et al. (1966) found in a study of social studies classes, in which secondary teachers were given a reading passage on free trade to discuss with their classes. A number of key points were highlighted in the plan that accompanied the reading passage. Like us, after transcribing his lessons, Bellack and his

team found that each teacher focused on different parts of the reading passage. But the bulk of the questions all the teachers asked were restatement of facts from the reading.

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 2: a first etic perspective

The following analysis makes use of the IRF (Initiation – Response - Feedback) structure suggested by Coulthard (1986), and will comment on the frequency of implicit, rather than explicit feedback by the teacher. Before discussing what emerges, a few preliminary observations are necessary. In the first place, nothing was known (at the start of this analysis) of the context in which the interactions occur, except that they took place some thirty years ago. Nothing about the teacher, students or setting has been revealed, although the internal evidence strongly points to it being an English language lesson, and it may be inferred that the teacher's goal is for the students to be able to orally produce key items correctly. Secondly, it is assumed that the episode is not a continuous dialogue between teacher and students, but it is not known how many, or which, of the students are verbally interacting with the teacher. Indeed, internal evidence in these excerpts suggests that they are not from one lesson, but from a number of lessons where a teacher (the same? or different? in each case) applies alternative techniques to elicit the target language.

Lines 1-3 clearly follow an IRF format, where the teacher initiates an exchange by an elicitation. Her intention (according to the side note at line 1) is for the students to answer the question. The student's response echoes what she has said in a conventional 'listen and repeat' mode, thus misinterpreting the cue. The teacher's feedback (line 3) implicitly contradicts this interpretation because she starts another exchange with an instruction to answer her question, not to repeat it. The next exchange follows the format IRRRF: the teacher's elicitation is followed by different responses from three students before she (again, implicitly) confirms the first response as correct. It may be assumed that her intonation, and perhaps other nonverbal signals, would be sufficient indication to the students that she is satisfied with their responses. In the exchange that follows in lines 9-13, the teacher's feedback (*Again* in line 10*)* serves as both feedback and initiation intended to imply that what the student said needed to be reformulated. The student understands the implied illocutionary intent, but has apparently not understood exactly what adjustment needs to be made, assuming that the pronoun is the target. When he uses another pronoun instead of the missing *Is* (line 11), the teacher's feedback is in the form of a recast - she echoes the student's utterance with a questioning intonation. Again, the student understands the teacher's intent, but again fails to produce the desired form, and merely repeats a single word, *holding*. It may be inferred that the teacher's attempt to negotiate meaning implicitly was unsuccessful. The final exchange here (lines 14-21) again shows an absence of explicit feedback. The teacher's initiation (line 14) receives an incorrect response from the first student. In spite of the implicit feedback (and initiations) in lines 16, 18 and 20 – and the correct response from another student (line 17) - the first student fails to produce the desired, correct form. Considering these four exchanges as a whole, it may be considered that implicit cues alone are ineffective: the teacher's feedback should be both more explicit and the student's attention focused more precisely

on what the teacher wants; otherwise, the students are left to guess "what's in the teacher's head?"

Transcript 3, Take 2 Reflection on action, Step 3: a second etic perspective

On reflection, a number of issues arise that seem obvious looking at the transcripts. First, asking a person what they are holding or wearing when we can see what they are holding or wearing seems curious if not absurd (Carlos would have felt very much at home in this classroom!). Had we included blindfolds with the materials, we could have avoided the type of error in the first transcript in which the student repeats the question the teacher asks rather than answering the question. The student might have had the same insight we had—why would a person ask another person what was being held if the person asking the question could clearly see the object? Wearing a blindfold might seem absurd also. But if the students were aware that the goal was to practise a pattern and the game-like atmosphere was a way to make the practice a bit more acceptable, the result might have been positive.

The adjective word order of color and material before a noun could have been practised with a command such as 'Put the yellow silk tie on Juan's desk and the blue felt fez on Ali's desk.' Though this task is also contrived, it would provide practice in understanding how we distinguish objects and draw students' attention away from the adjective word order pattern to meaning. This task would have gotten students out of their seats and also provided student-to-student interaction. Though we had the students asking each other what they were wearing or holding in pair work, since they could see what the answers were supposed to be, trying to figure out how to say the pattern was not engaging.

At the time that these exchanges were originally reported by Fanselow (1977b), there was an emphasis on the teaching and testing of discrete linguistic forms in a structural syllabus. Long (1988) referred to this approach as 'focus on forms' and argued that it was both outmoded and ineffective. He has also rejected a 'strong' form (Howatt, 1984) of communicative language teaching, in which any explicit attention to grammar is discouraged. Taking the view that a communicative approach to language learning is reasonable, he has subsequently elaborated an alternative approach to the explicit teaching of grammar which he has termed focus on *form (*Long, 1991*)*, which he defines as "overtly draw(ing) students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, pp 45-46). Similarly, Doughty & Williams (1998, p.3) and Ellis et al. (1999) suggest that a focus on form (in contrast to a focus on *forms*) always entails "isolation or extraction of linguistic features from context or from communicative activity".

Transcript 3, Take 3 Reflection on action

If these suggestions were followed in current practice, the Take 3 emphasis would not be, as it was in Fanselow (1977b) on the deliberate presentation and practice of pre-determined linguistic forms – which Krashen (1982) referred to as "the structure of the

day approach". Rather, there would be incidental and transitory attention to grammatical issues (Ellis, Loewen and Basturkmen, 1999) as they arise in a lesson, possibly because they impede communication, or because either the teacher or the learners wish to draw attention to a formal issue. Therefore, the misunderstanding in the first exchange above (*What are you holding?)* would unlikely to arise because in a communicative activity, students would not expect to repeat a question asked by the teacher. There would, of course, have to be a (communicatively) valid reason for the teacher to ask this particular question if she wised to avoid a sarcastic response such as 'Can't you see?' The second exchange, about a tie, would be mutually understood as relevant – but only if the activity the students were engaged in required the material to be specified, but would not in itself constitute a form-focused episode but one about meaning. The third example, where the teacher attempts to draw attention to the student's formal mistake would be regarded by Ellis *et al.* as a good example of a form-focused episode – assuming the error occurred in the course of a communicative activity, and the teacher considered intervention useful. As it is, the exchange would not be regarded as a complete form-focused episode, as – despite the two cues by the teacher - there is no indication of understanding (which Ellis et al. refer to as 'uptake') on the part of the student. It would be a matter of rapid executive decision-making by the teacher as to whether she should complete the episode, or to leave well alone and allow the communicative intention of the student to proceed. The final exchange, beginning with the teacher's prompt (*It's blue*) would not usually be regarded as a form-focused unless the teacher's move were stimulated by something (wrong) that the student had said. Moreover, merely reiterating the target form would not be considered a sufficient technique to arouse the student's awareness that an error had been made, let alone how it should be corrected.