

***Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers*** by Dick Allwright & Kathleen Bailey. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991. vii + 250 pp.

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Currently the field of applied linguistics is wrestling with its own identity. In the struggle to clarify the field, second language teaching and applied linguistics research are often discussed as if they are mutually exclusive pursuits. While most in the field agree that an interdisciplinary approach is necessary, far fewer include the language classroom as part of their interdisciplinary approach. Some applied linguists, in fact, would like to be freed from concerns with educational application. Sophisticated research programs do not want to be involved with teacher training (See the roundtable discussion in *IAL*, 1992).

Nevertheless, the field of applied linguistics has strong roots in language teaching and there is a growing body of classroom oriented research (Seliger & Long, 1983; Chaudron, 1988; Van Lier, 1988; Nunan, 1989). Moreover, interest in teachers as researchers is increasing. With the advent of teacher-conducted research, classroom teachers can be party to the excitement and intellectual involvement of academic research activity. Teachers and graduate students need not be freed from the classroom. Rather, they need to be given the freedom, as teachers, to take part in as rich an intellectual community as the researchers who have traditionally advised teachers on the basis of the latest, presumably research-proven method (Nunan, 1989; Pennycook, 1989).

In order to create effective classroom teacher researchers, Allwright & Bailey have written *Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers*, an accessible, yet unpatronizing introduction to teachers and/or graduate students who would like to conduct research in their (or their colleagues') classrooms. The book has three principle purposes: to give an extensive review of classroom research conducted to date; to show how this research is relevant to language classrooms; and to introduce the techniques of classroom research so that teachers can conduct research on their own.

Throughout the five main sections of the book, the authors emphasize the importance of developing exploratory teaching which provides active roles for professional researchers, teachers, and students. The first part of the book introduces the historical background and the current relevance of classroom research. The second part offers a detailed description of approach and methodology of classroom oriented research. The third, fourth and fifth parts introduce current studies in three main areas of classroom research: oral error, interaction analysis, and student receptivity. The epilogue makes up a sixth section which further contextualizes the authors' introduction to classroom research.

Part One of the book is divided into two chapters and provides definition and justification for classroom research. In the first chapter, the authors introduce the research-teaching dichotomy and propose classroom research as a missing "process" link needed in much second language research. The Pennsylvania Project (Smith, 1970) illustrates the problem with some research which is divorced from direct classroom observation. This method study was aimed at demonstrating the superiority of audio-lingual techniques to traditional techniques, but the results of this long-term, huge-scale project were inconclusive, largely because no observations were made inside classrooms. Most teachers probably didn't adhere to one specific method. In fact, teachers usually pick and choose techniques from various methods, using those activities which are appropriate for their immediate purpose. By investigating such choices and the processes that lead to them, classroom research may provide a more effective form of study than research which ignores classroom interaction. Originally method studies were done to prescribe a method which teachers could learn in their teacher training programs. Now classroom research supplies descriptions of interaction in language classrooms and leads to more fundamental insights.

Chapter two elaborates on the unique make-up of every classroom. Although planned aspects such as method (how to teach), syllabus (what to teach), and atmosphere can be dictated by external researchers, what goes on in the classroom may be highly variable, as the Pennsylvania Project exemplifies. Any classroom investigation must view a lesson not as teacher-created, but as co-produced through the interaction between the teacher and the students. Though the syllabus and method may be pre-ordained, and a particular atmosphere may be recommended by external

authorities, the interaction in the classroom determines how much of this syllabus is learned (input), how method is implemented (practice), and how well the atmosphere is created or perceived by the students (receptivity). This chapter also includes helpful explanations of the research terminology used to discuss such interaction.

Part Two further prepares teachers to do classroom research on their own. Chapter three deals with the initial steps of research. While the authors present both theory-driven experimental research and data-driven ethnographic research, they clearly favor action research for the investigation of practical issues in the classroom. Action research is described as a seven-part cycle which closely resembles a generic experimental research cycle (See Seliger & Shohamy, 1984). In action research, however, the specific plan for classroom action, rather than a hypothesis, is revised in order to further investigation. The authors also introduce the traditional experimental research terms, reliability, generalizability and validity using definitions that will be helpful to the classroom researcher.

After introducing terminology and different approaches to classroom research, Allwright & Bailey describe specific methods for collecting data in chapter four. The authors present discourse analysis as the predominant form of data collection in classroom research and draw many parallels with anthropological research. The observer's paradox, for example, first articulated by an anthropologist (Labov, 1972), suggests that researchers inevitably interfere with the situation being observed. Instead of fighting this paradox by keeping the subjects in ignorance, the action-research paradigm includes both students and teachers as active participants in the research. This not only alleviates artificial tension, but also recognizes the "subjects" as valuable sources of insight.

Part Three discusses oral errors and Chapter five begins by briefly summarizing the difference between contrastive analysis and error analysis. In discussing error, the authors identify several problems in its definition. Once an error is identified, error-treatment must be carefully applied. To illustrate the complexities of error treatment, the authors compare native-speaker misunderstandings and teacher-student misunderstandings. Drawing on Schegloff, Sacks & Jefferson (1977), the authors illustrate clear-cut differences between authentic native speaker and language classroom repair patterns, indicating that teacher fronted

classrooms, dominated by teacher-initiated repair may not be displaying authentic discourse patterns.

Chapter six addresses the problem of classroom error treatment in further detail. The authors emphasize the need for good teacher feedback in both the cognitive and the affective domains. As the authors discuss possible teacher treatment strategies, they review findings and raise questions about whether to treat error, when to treat error, and what treatment to use. The authors suggest that the more cognitive work involved on the part of the student, the better. Ideally, classroom repair should more closely approximate authentic repair patterns, working eventually toward self-monitored learning, or in Schegloff's terms, "self-initiated, self-repair."

Part four examines input and interaction in the language classroom and is divided into two chapters. Chapter seven introduces the most well-known research on input and interaction and provides a clear summary of the difference between Krashen's theory of comprehensible input and Long's theory of interaction. Chapter eight expands on the notion of interaction in the language classroom by discussing teacher talk, learning strategies, forced participation, and group work in light of the theoretical discussion of interaction just presented in the preceding chapter. The section on groupwork, for example, cites several sources which indicate that, in general, groupwork and pair-practice lead to more contributions on the part of the student, more extended interactions, and more negotiation of meaning than a teacher-fronted classroom situation. Throughout the discussion of interaction in the classroom, however, the authors remind the reader of the need to account for both observable and non-observable behavior. Although it seems that interaction is important, we need methods to measure egocentric interactions as well as other non-observable behaviors in the classroom. Allwright & Bailey suggest a number of research techniques including think-aloud approaches, retrospection, and questionnaires, as means to explore unobservable behavior.

Part five introduces the concept of receptivity, a term which Allwright & Bailey adapted from Stevick (1976) to describe the openness which students have towards learning the second language. This term is analogous to the Social, Psychological and Affective (SPA) terms more commonly used in applied linguistics research in both formal or naturalistic settings. However, Allwright & Bailey use the term receptivity specifically for classroom learning.

In chapter nine they identify eight aspects of the classroom which influence receptivity: the language and its culture; the teacher as a person; the other students; the teacher's way of teaching the course content; the course materials; the idea of success in the language; and the idea of communicating with other people. The authors supply concise definitions of each of these categories and include brief, relevant examples. In chapter ten, the authors discuss a variety of classroom research in relation to the eight categories of receptivity. They emphasize the potential for diary studies to shed light on the language classroom. They liberally cite Bailey's (1983) diary studies and Schumann & Schumann's (1977) study about their experience learning Farsi and relate them to several categories of receptivity. While diary studies are not an end in themselves, the questions they raise can lead to the formation of plausible models which foster relevant classroom research.

The epilogue provides further practical suggestions for the budding teacher-researcher. In the future, the authors propose that the professional researcher serve at a given school as a consultant, advising other teachers how to go about doing their own research, rather than imposing his/her particular research agenda on those teachers. Other classroom teachers can collaborate by first brainstorming their ideas about relevant problem areas, then dividing the reading of previous background research, conducting their classroom studies, and finally producing a write-up for conference presentation or publication.

In keeping with the philosophy that teachers should become their own best researchers, the authors provide suggestions for further reading, discussion starters and various research project ideas at the end of each chapter. These exercises are realistically devised and highly useful study aids. The suggestions for further reading provide manageable lists of relevant literature and brief synopses of each listing. In addition, the discussion starters encourage students to apply the new information to their own classroom experiences and to conceive of the various flow charts not simply as artifacts to organize information, but as tools which can be used to analyze real data. Each chapter also includes mini-projects which encourage the reader to apply the concepts of the preceding chapter to their own language learning or teaching experience. Four of the chapters also include major projects. The explicit directions for these projects almost ensure that they will be done. These are

not cursory suggestions or simple examples, but actual guides which encourage original research.

As these major projects demonstrate, classroom research, particularly action research, encourages the teachers to seek and provide answers within their own, or their colleagues' classrooms. Thus, classroom research differs from the traditional research cycle which seeks answers in a more controlled environment, while still maintaining the same active and never-ending curiosity that accompanies traditional research. Teachers should be able to experience research as a cycle, not simply as an end dictated from some lofty research institution. *Focus on the Language Classroom* is a valuable first step in the re-definition of the teacher, not merely as a cog in the machinery of education, but rather as the "transformative intellectual" encouraged by Giroux (1989).

Without a doubt, this volume is an essential for any graduate course in classroom research, or for any language teacher or graduate student who feels a disturbing gap between ambitious university research and the diluted suggestions passed down and minimally applied in language classrooms. The inspiration and insight provided in *Focus on the Language Classroom* suggests that classroom research is an exciting new direction for applied linguistics.

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