

## ***Chapter 10 Afterward\****

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### **First Steps**

I started transcribing 46 years ago, live transcription, not from audiotapes or digital recorders. I transcribed exchanges between 12 practice teachers I was supervising as part of my responsibilities at a teachers' college in Nigeria. One catch was that these practice teachers, who were my students, all had from two to twenty years more experience than I had. In addition, they were teaching subjects I knew nothing about such as Nigerian history and geography, and how to calculate costs and expenses in pounds, shillings and pence. So, I transcribed initially to overcome my ignorance. I needed to meet my students, who were practice teaching, every other day to discuss their lessons. I wanted to be able to have discussions that were not a waste of the teachers' time.

There were two streams of grades 1 to 6. I spent the first half of each period in one stream and the second half of each period in the other stream of the same grade. I wrote down as many comments, questions and answers each teacher made and as many comments, questions and answers their students made. I had conferences with pairs of my students teaching the same grade. During my conferences I reported to both of them what I had transcribed in each stream. The teachers as a result got a clearer idea of what both they and the students were saying and doing. Each teacher also got ideas from what was going on in

*\*from Creating classroom communities of learning: International case studies and perspectives. Edited by Roger Barnard and Maria Torres-Guzman. 2008. Clevedon, England. Multilingual Matters.*

another class dealing with the identical material. For example, one teacher often introduced an explorer by showing a picture of the person in a book he had borrowed from the library. The teacher in the other stream of the same grade often drew sketches on the blackboard and asked students to come up and add details to show how they imagined the explorer might have looked. Each teacher usually appreciated the details I shared from the transcriptions because they gave each teacher ideas for their subsequent lessons.

In my next position, also at a teacher training college, I was asked to teach a course in classroom observation. We asked potential teachers, who were straight out of college, to enroll in the course so they could visit schools and see what teaching was like. While most of them enjoyed visiting a wide range of schools and grade levels, I found the reports they gave in class on their observations rather general and very judgmental. After each one shared their first reports in class, we all agreed that to learn more about what was going on we had to change the format of the reports. We also agreed that we had to do something about the judgments they were making. We were guests with less experience than the teachers we were observing. In addition, we used the same schools we observed in as practice teaching sites so we decided we had to do something about being judgmental.

The potential teachers in my classes did not limit their judgments to the interactions. They often made judgments about students. Each judgment we make about a student--she's not motivated; he's a hard worker--is a kind of diagnosis. If we are wrong in our diagnosis, we will not be able to provide the right treatment. So, I tried to develop the ability to suspend our judgments of teachers as well as students.

Since I had just returned from Nigeria, transcription was still very much on my mind. So, I suggested that subsequent reports should contain some transcribed exchanges. I suggested that my students visit in pairs so that they could capture more exchanges. In those days, tape recorders were available but they were very heavy and cumbersome so we stuck with live transcription.

## **Second Steps**

As I was teaching the classroom observation course, together with those in the class, I started to look for books and articles about classroom observation. The one I found that initially influenced me the most was Arno Bellack's *The language of the classroom* (1966). Since he was teaching at the same teachers' college I was, I had many opportunities to discuss his work with him and his colleagues. Though he had developed a category system, he did not limit himself to category systems in his thinking about classroom observation. He introduced me to many anthropological studies not only of classroom interaction but also of conversational interaction.

I adapted Bellack's categories for ESOL classrooms as a means to concentrate on describing rather than judging. (Fanselow 1977; 1987) However, many of my students made the same types of judgments they previously did as soon as they finished coding a transcript. They used the coding to support their judgments! So, I abandoned my confidence in using coding systems to decrease judgments. However, I did not abandon my confidence in using coding systems as a tool to analyze transcriptions. As we coded, we consistently had to ask ourselves whether a particular communication was in one category or another. And often the answer was that the

communication had characteristics that made it difficult to say for sure which category it belonged in.

These discussions of how to code communications led me to my next attempt to find a way to observe so that we could *discover* something rather than to judge what we were observing. But given the very strong tendency most have to judge, I decided to develop a way for observers to use their judgments as a step in their analysis.

When an observer said that a teacher in a transcript was overbearing, I would ask the observer, always working with a partner, to find evidence that the teacher was not overbearing. Of course, not all judgments are negative. But I treated positive judgments in the same way. When an observer claimed that the teacher engaged the students, I would ask the observer and partner to find evidence that showed that the students were not engaged. Of course, this procedure is nothing but a variation of the negation of hypotheses that is the basis of most research. We try to disprove what we claim. (Fanselow 1988; 1992; Fanselow & Barnard, 2005)

Another aim of the observation courses I taught was to introduce my students to ways of expanding the range of activities they could use both in their practice teaching and on the job. I wanted teachers to be able to analyze transcripts not only to understand interactions better and see something they had not previously seen. I also wanted teachers to be able to use the transcripts to generate alternative practices, just as I had used my transcripts in Nigeria to suggest alternative practices.

In Nigeria, I saw that when teachers in pairs generated alternative practices together, through seeing each other's teaching, as reflected in my transcriptions, they began to feel more autonomous. Even if supervisors and those who prepare teachers always had many useful suggestions to make to teachers, there are rarely enough supervisors and teacher trainers available to work with all teachers. And the amount of time that teachers have to meet supervisors and teacher trainers is limited. So the more autonomous teachers can be, the more they can learn from each other in the setting they are in, the more likely they are going to continue to expand the range of activities they use.

As you have noticed, I have suggested in a number of places that expanding the range of activities we use in our teaching is valuable. I present a number of reasons in my books to support this claim. But since this claim is not directly related to the theme of this book, I will not re-state the reasons here. I just wanted to point out that I developed two key reasons for analyzing transcripts: see something we had not noticed before - move beyond our initial interpretation and judgment - and expand the range of our teaching practices.

### **Most recent steps**

Since the early sixties, when I started transcribing, there has been a lot of focus on classroom observation and the analysis of interactions. As I look back at the limited view I had of the complexity of interactions when I simply shared what one teacher did in a history lesson with another teacher who had taught the same lesson in a slightly different way I am somewhat bemused.

However, the fact that I have learned how limited my initial work in observation was has been an exhilarating experience. There has been a great deal of thoughtful work since my days in Nigeria. Many of the developments in the field of observation in ESOL are illustrated in a book edited by two of Dick Allwright's former students to honor Dick's contributions to the field and his retirement. (Gieve & Miller, 2005), which contains the chapter Roger and I wrote that this present book is based on. Though it is unlikely we would have written the chapter had Simon Gieve and Inés Miller not invited us to submit a proposal, we had become increasingly frustrated by what we saw as the doctrinaire attitude in some writings about classroom interactions, including some earlier ones of our own! After so many years of transcribing and analyzing transcripts, as well as later audio and video excerpts, we began to wonder how we might combine some of our previous ideas and those of others in an approach that would be more genuinely exploratory.

As we reflected on the idea of moving beyond single interpretations of transcripts, we were reminded of a description of three types of baseball umpires.

Umpire type 1: *"I calls 'em the way I sees 'em."*

Umpire type 2: *"I calls 'em the way they iz"*.

Umpire type 3: *"They ain't nothin till I calls 'em."*

The first type of umpire is what the Take 1, Take 2, Take 3 approach is about. We encourage each person to 'call them' as he/she sees them, not pretending to mistake individual interpretations for reality nor thinking that individual interpretations of reality determine what is happening. The second and third types of umpire are those who present one-dimensional interpretations.

## **Future Steps - Applying the Take 1, Take 2, Take 3 Methodology**

As I reflect on the chapters in this book, I think they deal with two of the central problems that pop up in many of the usual conversations about teaching and in many of the analyses of classroom interaction: 1. being doctrinaire and one-dimensional\*, thus preventing us from seeing something new, and 2. having a limited range of transcribed activities we can use to expand our repertoire of activities.

Re the first problem, because two different people independently interpret each set of data, the analyses will less likely be one-dimensional or doctrinaire. We think that when you see the two interpretations of each set of excerpts, you will be liberated to make your own interpretation because you will have seen that two other people made interpretations that are often quite different. Reading two interpretations is also likely to lead you to see something different because they remind you that you do not have to be doctrinaire or one-dimensional.

\*Of course, we teachers are not the only people who tend to be doctrinaire and one-dimensional. Just as I received the drafts of these chapters, I read in the *New Yorker* (January 29, 2007) an excerpt of a book by Jerone Groopman titled *What's the trouble? How doctors think*. The theme of the book is that doctors very often diagnose a patient within the first few seconds of a consultation! The author starts the book by describing a misdiagnosis he made early in his career based on an initial impression rather than a second or third take. A forest ranger in his thirties came into the doctor's office. The ranger was tanned, looked fit and had not an ounce of fat on him. He said that when he climbed up the ranges with his 10-kilo backpack on he often felt a pain in his chest. He said that in the last couple of days he had the pain in his chest even

when not climbing with his 10-kilo backpack. The doctor had an electro cardiogram done. He also had a blood test done to check for a couple of items that might indicate a heart problem. But because the ranger looked so fit, the doctor could not believe he had a heart problem. When the results of the electro cardiogram and the couple of blood tests did not reveal any particular problem, the doctor sent the ranger home. That night, the ranger had a heart attack! The doctor writes in his book, and teaches in his classes, that it is very dangerous to base a diagnosis on first impressions because such a diagnosis can lead both to negative consequences for patient health and also to potential malpractice suits. He said that he should have ordered additional blood tests and had the ranger spend the night in the hospital under observation. A tanned face and a fit appearance provide a positive first take. But looking beneath the surface, in teaching as in medicine is crucial. Our first take requires looking beneath the surface and even there we could see that there are possible second and third takes.

Re the second problem - having a limited range of data - you now have a wide range of data from many countries and many subjects. "So what?" some might ask. Well, because you have such a rich set of data, we think you will be stimulated to compare and contrast the separate excerpts. In Nigeria, I had transcripts from 12 teachers but all in the same primary school. You have transcripts from nine teachers in nine different countries with a wide range of content areas. And you have Take 1 and Take 2 - two interpretations - on each set of data plus a set of questions for Take 3 - your own interpretation.

We hope that when you reflect on such a wide range of data and interpretations you will feel free to play with activities you use and alter them. Why not try some

activities teachers regularly use in Japan or New Zealand or Taiwan or Canada in your own classes? The key aim of *Take 3* is to generate alternative moves or scripts from those in the original transcribed excerpt from a lesson.

## **Patterns in classroom discourse and in conversations about classroom discourse**

Just as you have seen many similar patterns in classroom discourse, so after reading the chapters in this book, you have seen that there are patterns of discourse in conversations about teaching. We had two aims when we wrote *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3*. One was to encourage everyone to feel free to interpret transcriptions differently - alternative interpretations from those of the first interpreters. Another was to remind us all that one-dimensional or conventional interpretations, as well as unsupported claims, are likely to be false because the meanings in all discourse are complex, full of multiple meanings, ambiguous and likely to be interpreted quite differently by different participants.

We hoped that by introducing the steps we developed in *Take 1, Take 2 and Take 3*, everyone would both interpret transcriptions differently and move beyond one-dimensional, conventional interpretations and making claims without support. In the event, I have discovered as I read and re-read the chapters in this book that just as we often are controlled/trapped by rules of classroom discourse, so we are often controlled/trapped by rules of discourse in our conversations about teaching.

I also discovered something that I had failed to notice before: in some one-dimensional interpretations - really judgments since they tend to be black and white,

good or bad - I found a tendency to inflate some judgments in a positive way. Thinking that *everyone* would be able to change, as I said we had hoped in the first sentence was obviously naïve. In each chapter, I found examples of the kinds of interpretations we think reflect the complexity of classroom interaction and some that do not, in different proportions. I found it useful as I read and re-read each chapter to identify examples of the usual interpretations and the ones we are advocating. As you read and re-read the chapters, you might find it useful to identify each type we advocate as well.

The purpose of the following examples is not to cast aspersions on those who made some of the usual interpretations rather than the alternative interpretations we are advocating. Rather, the purpose is to show that the rules of discourse control us a great deal more than we realize. The more we write down our interpretations, as the educators have in this book, the more we label them, the more we will be able to change our discourse in our discussions of our teaching.

Here are my comments about a few examples of what I consider to be each type: one-dimensional and multi-dimensional, conventional and unconventional, claims supported and not supported by data.

**One-dimensional/multiple dimensional interpretations**

*One-dimensional interpretations*

<b>Author's interpretation</b>	<b>Alternative Interpretation</b>
[The teacher] provides a model. . . However, . . .[the student] ignores this	Perhaps the student ignored what the teacher had said. Perhaps the student was

<p>repetition and continues. . . .</p>	<p>engaged in his comment and did not hear what the teacher said. Perhaps the student did not hear any difference between what he had said and what the teacher “modeled” so maybe the teacher’s words were not a model, to name a few other possibilities.</p>
<p>.... .the teacher code-mixes the two languages in her utterances in order to get the attention of the learners. . .</p>	<p>The teacher might also code-mix because s/he is not sure the students understand either directions or word equivalents in English. Or the teacher might not have had s strong command of English to use it more and avoid code mixing. Maybe the teacher had been taught in the same way and felt that code mixing was the expected and normal way to speak in English class.</p>

*Multiple dimensional interpretations*

<b>Author’s interpretation</b>	<b>Alternative Interpretation</b>
<p>As in the previous segments, she uses the adverbial “now” as a secondary device because she starts with the “okay”. “Okay” is an American U.S.</p>	<p>The commentator presents 3 different meanings of “okay”. Of course there are many more but not that many more in this particular context.</p>

<p>colloquialism implying democracy and consent. Yet, as it has come to be commonly used, and used in this setting, it is a weaker version of consent; it is used in a similar way as ‘now’—to call attention to the next move. In this case, evaluation.”</p>	
<p>To a large extent to this may be due to a lack of Cognitive Academic language Proficiency—or even Basic Interactional Conversation Skills (Cummins 1981) not only on their part but also on their teachers’.</p>	<p>We see 4 dimensions here: proficiency or skills on the part of the student or teacher.</p>
<p>[These routines] were performed many times throughout the school day. . . While the routine is linguistically simple and at first blush may be dismissed as unimportant, the attention granted it by the teacher points to a cultural significance that surpasses its surface simplicity.</p>	<p>The commentator explicitly states that the first interpretation is not adequate and suggests another.</p>

**Conventional and unconventional interpretations**

*Conventional interpretations*

<b>Author's interpretation</b>	<b>Alternative Interpretation</b>
<p>The teacher uses various strategies to reinforce the students' knowledge of English, such as requesting repetition, asking students to name the letters that spell the word while she writes them on the board, and extending their understanding of the meaning by differentiating it from amore specific details of the temporal location of their interaction.</p>	<p>While repetition and spelling might reinforce, if students already know the words and can spell them, the repetition and spelling could be a turn off or a way to bore students. There is no indication in the transcript that the students had any difficulty with the words or the spelling.</p>
<p>. . . the teacher will also change direction, in this case interrupting the reading of the story to engage the class in a discussion about the meaning of the word 'bony'.</p>	<p>In the so-called discussion, one student said "bones" and one student touched a part of the body with a bone inside. I say "so called" because if we describe saying one word and pointing to a part of our body a <i>discussion</i>, what would we call long comments between two or more people about the same topic</p>

***Un-conventional interpretations***

<p>How does the teacher use and not use the student's prior knowledge to connect them to the topic of study?</p>	<p>Asking how something might apply and might not apply is what we refer to as testing the null-hypothesis in our original</p>
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	<p>paper. We are more likely to see another dimension of what we are interpreting if we look at both sides. In police work all too often in some places people are determined to be guilty and then evidence is found to support the initial claim. This is one reason the work of defense lawyers is so crucial. And so in exploring teaching, we have to find evidence that does not support our claim as well as evidence that we think does support our claim.</p>
<p>The teacher repeats that the students do not remember (Turns 1, 5, and 9). Is the teacher referring to the content or the language? Can it be both and what evidence can you find for each?</p>	<p>Looking at both sides, or in this case three sides of the same communication.</p>
<p>[The teacher] then feels the need to negotiate the meaning of the key word “bony”, which occurs four times in succession in the book text. The students’ response “bones” . . . suggests that this is understood, but the teacher decides that further negotiation is required and,</p>	<p>By looking from the perspective of the students as well as from the perspective of the teacher, we have two sides to consider rather than one.</p>

<p>leaving the book text, elicits a physical response by instructing students to feel their bones. “bony” . . .[is] identified by the teacher as [an item] in the book text which may be problematic for the students to comprehend, and therefore require a form of meaningful negotiation beyond a more comprehension check. This can be seen as a one-sided form of negotiation for meaning, since it is the teacher who determines which words represent items of possible misunderstanding.</p>	
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**Claims supported and not supported by data**

*Claims supported by data*

<p>Three aspects of this dynamic exchange merit attention. Firstly, the fast-paced interaction, of which this is a small fragment, is characterized by incomplete and overlapping turns in which suggestions are made and ideas rebound. Children’s conversational asides and interruptions, marked by [, are frequently</p>	<p>In addition to the examples cited for each claim shown here, the author refers to many other lines and relates them to her claims.</p>
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<p>‘taken up’ and woven into the flow of talk, revealing how students’ interests, rather than the teacher’s intentions, can at times divert the pedagogic agenda.</p> <p>Secondly, the tone of the discourse is provisional and speculative, tentativeness reflected in the level of modality, ‘could’ ‘would’ and ‘probably’, and Robert’s (Ro) declaration that his idea is ‘just a guess’. The teacher’s locution ‘I bet you’ functions as a ‘modal adjunct’ that entertains the possibility of alternative viewpoints and uncertainty in discourse.</p> <p>..Finally, students are speculating and reasoning, problem solving and, crucial to their effectiveness as learners, asking questions.</p>	
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*Claims not supported by data*

<p>“You should tip your tongue lower.” Is referred to as a meta-cognitive explanation.</p>	<p>If such a short comment is called an explanation, what would either a longer, more precise comment be called and what would what are normally called explanations - multiple details or</p>
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	reasons—be called?
. . .the teacher provides a brief evaluation—typically, “good,” “OK,” “yes,” or a similar expression of positive reinforcement. . .	When such words are said constantly , after both incorrect and correct responses, the claim that they either evaluate or provide positive reinforcement has to be questioned; when teachers transcribe their teaching, they often are unaware of how frequent they say these words and how indiscriminate their use of the words is.
She commends him on the content of his answer “Right” and “very good”, but recasts it into a more target-like form—long legs with sharp claws. (Student had said “ She has a long leg, and a skinny leg, and a sharp claws.”)	The teacher says the words correctly - whether the teacher heard the student errors or not is unclear so recast is a bit of a claim; also to say that “Right” and “very good” are commendations, especially since there response had so many errors seems a bit overstated.
Here. . . we see . . .significant student input and the co-construction of discourse and knowledge along the way.	This comment was made after a transcription in which the teacher said 265 words and individual students said around 25 words. If student input that is only 10% of the conversation is ‘significant’, what would we call 50%?

I mentioned the richness of the data that the nine teachers from nine countries provide. Rich as it is, unless each of us interprets the data in multi-dimensional and

unconventional ways and avoids making claims without support, the data will not enrich *us*. We have to interpret from a range of perspectives, including some the exact opposite of those who did both the first and second take. As I said in the preface to the Japanese edition of my book, *Try the opposite* (Fanselow, 1999: x), “[t]he alternative practices are not presented as better practices. The explanations offered are not presented as different practices, different explanations. One of the tasks for you as a reader in fact will be to generate still other alternative practices and explanations”.

### **Back to First and Second Steps**

I began my exploration of teaching in Nigeria. Limited as my methodology was, many experiences unrelated to transcriptions in Nigeria transformed my life. I did electrical work to earn money for college in Chicago. In the United States, we usually push a wall switch up to turn a ceiling light on and push it down to turn the ceiling light off. When I got to Nigeria and pushed the wall switch up, I turned the ceiling light off rather than on! And when I pushed the wall switch down, I turned the ceiling light on! My first thought was why did the electricians in Nigeria install all the wall switches wrong! Well, in the event, I realized as Hamlet says, in a one-dimensional but thought provoking comment, "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking that makes it so!" (Act 2, scene 2, 239-251) During my years in Nigeria, as well as Togo and Somalia, I experienced many, many other moments that turned my previous values upside down and inside out - before I heard of Dianna Ross's song with this title.

In our Introduction, we highlighted the powerful influence of cultural practices outside the classroom on practices inside the classroom. The example I just gave

about light switches highlights the crucial role that out of class expectations and practices play on practices inside the classroom.

In retrospect, I am a bit chagrined that it took me so long to advocate multiple interpretations of the same data rather than one-dimensional interpretations, unconventional rather than conventional interpretations, and interpretations supported by a great deal of data. I majored in literature in university. My literature professors constantly asked us to develop a range of alternative or unconventional interpretations of scenes in novels or plays and lines in poems. And making claims like “The play clearly shows how clever Wilde was with words” without any data earned an F in a heartbeat.

In spite of this training, it took me quite a few years to apply these lessons to the analysis of transcripts. Gregory Bateson provides a possible reason:

[People often miss the obvious] because people are self-corrective systems. They are self-corrective against disturbance, and if the obvious is not of a kind that [we] can easily assimilate without internal disturbance, [our] self-corrective mechanisms work to sidetrack it, to hide it, even to the extent of shutting the eyes if necessary, or shutting off various parts of the process of perception. Disturbing information can be framed like a pearl so that it doesn't make a nuisance of itself . . . . (Bateson, 1972: 428)

At any rate, when Roger and I wrote *Take 1, Take 2, Take 3*, I finally saw a way to apply the methodology I had developed in my study of literature to transcripts. (Having said “I finally applied the methodology” does not mean I apply it naturally; I have to work at it just as I am asking you to work at it by labeling interpretations that

are multiple versus one-dimensional, conventional versus un-conventional and are supported by the data and not inflated rather than not being supported by the data and being inflated.) If we analyze transcripts the same way we analyze lines in plays, we can not only develop a range of interpretations but we can also suspend our judgments. And we can feel free--liberated--to change some of the lines in our subsequent lessons just as we feel free to alter a line in a play or novel or poem to produce a different effect. When our goal is to see something new in what we experience, we eliminate the natural tendency to judge and focus on analysis and multiple interpretations.

### **Questions about sampling**

At workshops, when we present the types of short transcripts the authors in this book present, many participants raise the question of sampling. "How can you hope to understand classroom interactions when you deal with such short exchanges?" We cannot prove that short exchanges are representative. But after we have looked at transcripts of entire lessons, we have consistently seen that short excerpts are usually representative of the entire class.

In literature, the same phenomenon obtains. If we read a few pages from *Jane Eyre*, we find the style, theme, characterization, use of images, etc. is similar to scores of other pages. In medicine, the same phenomenon also obtains. If you want to find out your blood type, cholesterol level, etc., you do not have to have all of your blood taken out but just a few tubes of blood. As William Blake wrote in *Auguries of Innocence* more than two centuries ago:

**To see a World in a Grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour.**

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