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# Making Sense of Language Teaching: Teachers' Principles and Classroom Practices

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From observed lessons and subsequent interviews and elicitation procedures, 18 experienced teachers of ESL to adults and children in an Australian context described their classroom practices and explained these in relation to the underlying language teaching principles that they saw as guiding their work. The purpose of the study was to discover the meanings the teachers gave to their classroom work in terms of the particular relationships they identified between practice and principle. Despite being undertaken within a particular teaching situation, the study revealed both individual and group diversity in the practices they adopted and in their underlying principles. In addition, a practice widely adopted across the group appeared to be based upon diverse principles, just as a single principle that was commonly shared among the teachers was associated by them with a wide range of practices. Closer examination of the whole group data, however, revealed a particular pattern in the links that the teachers made between principles and practices. The complex relationships uncovered in the study between thinking and action in the work of experienced language teachers have implications for curriculum innovation, teacher education, and for language classroom research.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TEACHER THINKING FOR LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

This paper focuses upon the ways in which a particular group of language teachers conceptualized their classroom practice. They are experienced teachers who, at the time of the study, were teaching English as a Second Language in Australia. (The acronym ESL is most commonly used in professional parlance in Australia.) The paper reports on a particular investigation that moved in focus from observed and self-reported practices to the underlying rationales that the teachers attributed to such practices. Following Garfinkel (1967), the study aimed to uncover how language teachers in a particular teaching situation described their work and what specific meanings they attributed to it that were seen by them as appropriate and justifiable. The investigation therefore aimed to discover the relationships between teachers' thinking and actions. In this way, the study explored the *habitus* of a particular group of experienced practitioners working in a

particular social field by uncovering those dispositions of both the individual and of the group which, according to Bourdieu, are likely to generate a range of specific practices (Bourdieu 1990 and 1991). We particularly sought to discover whether or not the teachers in the study shared what Bourdieu describes as *le sens pratique* (Bourdieu 1980; Grenfell 1998). That is, do the teachers share a particular set of dispositions or principles and, furthermore, is there a clear relationship across the group between principles and practices that may reflect a collective language pedagogy?

The detailed investigations of Burns (1993), Gimenez (1995), Freeman (1991), Johnson (1989), and Woods (1996) signal a rapidly growing interest in how language teachers conceptualize their work. These studies were largely inspired by a number of influential accounts during the 1980s of the beliefs and knowledge of novice and experienced teachers across subject areas and levels in the education system (Calderhead 1987; Clandinin 1986; Clark and Peterson 1986; Elbaz 1983; Shavelson and Stern 1981; Shulman 1987; *inter alia*.) To date, much of the work on language teaching has described the thinking and actions of novice language teachers in training and has focused upon relatively small samples. Therefore, a major motivation for the present study was to explore the theoretically and experientially informed pedagogy of a reasonably substantial group of established language teachers in a particular working situation. Again, whilst most previous studies of language teacher thinking involve reflections on recalled or idealized practices, a purpose here was to uncover experienced teachers' constructions of their work in direct relationship to observed classroom behaviour.

On the surface, teachers appear to be eclectic in their practice. Over time they build up practical skills that involve dealing with the interaction of the complex array of factors within classroom work (Anning 1988). Such work is strongly influenced by teachers' theoretical frameworks derived from professional training and, particularly, from experiences as both a learner from early childhood onwards and during their career as a teacher. Not surprisingly, therefore, research on teacher thinking suggests that uncovering *why* teachers teach the ways they do is a difficult undertaking (Calderhead 1988). However, there are four main reasons why this kind of undertaking is important:

- Identifying the guiding principles that teachers articulate in relation to their classroom work can complement observational studies by enabling research to go beyond description towards the understanding and explanation of teacher action.
- Such principles have been seen by several researchers in the field of second language education as a source of experientially-based professional 'know how' that may serve as a focus both for initial teacher education and for reflection in ongoing teacher development (Flowerdew *et al.* 1992; Richards and Lockhart 1994; Freeman and Richards 1996).
- Any innovation in classroom practice—from the adoption of a new

technique or textbook to the implementation of a new curriculum—has to be accommodated within the teacher's own framework of teaching principles. Greater awareness of such frameworks across a group of teachers within a particular situation can inform curriculum policy in relation to any innovation that may be plausible in that situation.

- Conversely, such principles may contribute frameworks for language pedagogy emerging directly from classroom work in a range of different teaching situations that would generate grounded alternatives to the 'accepted wisdom' of language teaching methodology emanating from certain academic traditions or institutions or from writers of textbooks at some distance from actual contexts of teaching (Kumaravadivelu 1994; Pennycook 1994; Phillipson 1992).

Perhaps because of the relative infancy of the field of research, terms used in the literature to describe teacher conceptualizations of their practice are diverse and sometimes overlapping or distinctive in their designation. In an overview of the research, Pajares (1992) identifies the variety of theoretical constructs that have been proposed by researchers. Terms used range from 'beliefs', 'principles', and 'intuitive' or 'implicit theories' to 'professional craft knowledge'. The concept of 'pedagogic principles' adopted in the present study derives from an earlier investigation with 106 experienced teachers of English as a foreign language (Breen 1991). Here it was found that the diverse reasons the teachers gave for particular techniques that they adopted during language lessons revealed a finite set of guiding principles that appeared to be shared across the group. The principles, in turn, appeared to derive from underlying beliefs or personal theories the teachers held regarding the nature of the broader educational process, the nature of language, how it is learned, and how it may be best taught. The possible relationship between such beliefs, guiding pedagogic principles, and classroom actions—including immediate on-going thinking and decision-making—is illustrated in Figure 1.

A teacher's beliefs or personal theories about language, about the educational process, and learning and teaching a language within this process tend to be experientially informed and appear to become deeply held and largely context-independent. The pedagogic principles which have been shaped and generated by these more abstract and underlying beliefs serve to mediate between them and the teacher's on-going decision-making and actions with a particular class of learners in a particular teaching situation. We might believe, for example, that learning a language entails the engagement of the individual in an extension of his or her social identity. One pedagogic principle expressing this belief might be to seek any way of explicitly engaging learners, as they work, in the dynamic of the classroom group as a contributory support for communicative and social adaptability. Enacting this principle in a particular class would entail selecting and implementing certain activities that we see as appropriate to the learners in the immediate learning conditions. Principles significantly influence how the

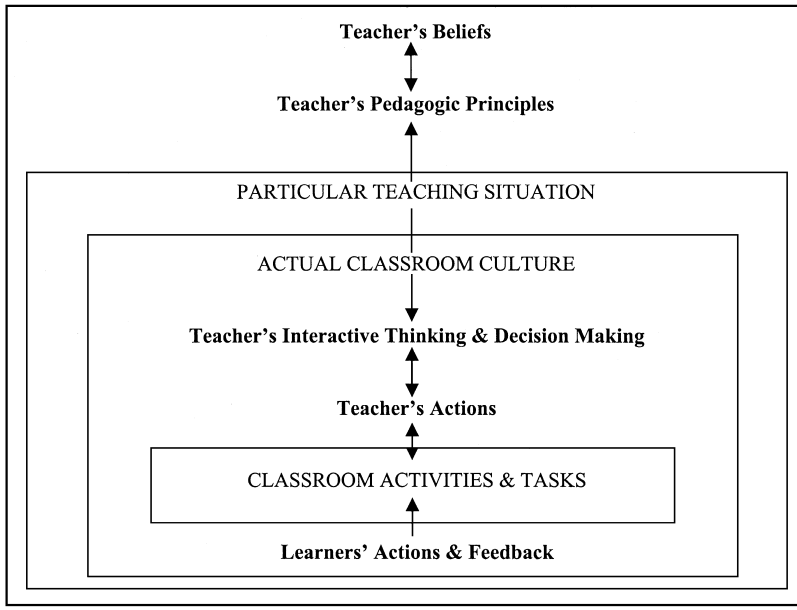


*Figure 1: Teacher conceptualizations and classroom practices*

teacher orchestrates the interaction between learner, teacher, and subject matter in a particular classroom context with particular resources. Situational demands and constraints and the specific social relationships and ways of working (or culture) jointly developed with the learners in the class entail the teacher's *selective* reliance on particular principles and those practices that the teacher regards as expressions of them. Pedagogic principles are reflexive in both shaping what the teacher does whilst being responsive to what the teacher observes about the learners' behaviour and their achievements in the class.

It seems that teachers' principles become more entrenched with increasing experience (Munby 1982; Clark and Peterson 1986). However, in addition to the influence of their experience as learners and teachers and of the particular situations in which they work, it is likely that teachers will also think about their work through spontaneous reflection upon the more immediate context. What they actually do in the classroom and the on-going decisions they make will test out and, in turn, further refine some of their principles. While it has been suggested that principles are implicit in practice (Calderhead 1988), it may be claimed also that they emerge from the trying out of practices. Therefore the relationship between practices and principles is likely to be interactive; each will influence the other as the teacher works from day to day. Over time, a teacher may also evolve a framework of principles made up of 'core' principles that are applied across teaching situations and 'peripheral', more malleable principles that are thereby more

adaptable to shifting contexts of work. This likelihood is further justification for extending our present knowledge of language teacher thinking through investigations with more experienced language teachers working in specific situations. Furthermore, discovering relationships that teachers identify between how they conceptualize their work and their actual classroom behaviour can also be seen as a means to exploring language teaching as the situated interaction of dispositions and social practices in a particular field of professional activity.

## AIMS OF THE STUDY

Motivated by these potential benefits in extending our knowledge of why language teachers teach the ways they do, the particular study on which this paper is based aimed to discover what the relationships might be between language teachers' classroom practices and the principles which they identified as guiding these practices (Breen *et al.* 1998). Focusing upon a group of experienced teachers in a particular situation, we wished to explore:

1 How each of them worked in the classroom.
2 The rationale each of them provided for their ways of working as a means to uncovering underlying pedagogic principles.
3 The relationships they individually traced between their own principles and particular practices that they adopted.
4 The relationships revealed across the whole group of teachers between a commonly held principle and the practices that they identified with it.

As the study focused upon teachers in a particular situation, the principles they articulated and, more significantly, the priority they gave to such principles might also reflect the ways in which the teachers made particular sense of the specific demands of that situation. However, we were primarily concerned with they ways in which both the individual teacher and the group conceptualized their classroom behaviour from their perspective as experienced practitioners and what the patterns would be in the links they made between thinking and action.

## METHOD: THE PARTICIPANTS

Eighteen ESL teachers and their intact classes participated in this study. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the teachers in the group (all names are pseudonyms chosen by the teachers). Ten worked in adult classes and eight worked in classes for primary school children. There were 14 female teachers (evenly distributed as teachers of children and teachers of adults) and four male teachers (one teaching children and three teaching adults). The teachers had varying degrees of general teaching experience ranging from 5 to 33 years. The least experienced teacher of ESL had specialized in the area for 3 years, whereas the majority had been in ESL teaching for more than 7 years.

*Table 1: The teachers' qualifications and experience*

| Teacher | Child/ Adult | ESL Experience | Total Experience | TESOL Quals | Current Study | Languages Spoken |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mary | Child | 14 | 33 | RSA | N | N |
| Sue | Child | 6 | 27 | N | P/Grad | N |
| Leng | Child | 5 | 8 | Masters | N | Cantonese |
| Amy | Child | 5 | 6 | Y | Masters | Italian |
| Kerry | Child | 8 | 17 | N | Grd Cert | Greek |
| Belinda | Adult | 20 | 22 | Grd Dip | N | French German Italian Spanish |
| Marjory | Adult | 3 | 11 | BEd (Tesol) | N | Indonesian French |
| Graham | Adult | 15 | 28 | BEd major | plan to start Masters | Spanish |
| Nathan | Adult | 5 | 5 | N | Grd Dip Arts | N |
| Athena | Child | 12 | 21 | Y | BEd | N |
| Peta | Child | 12 | 12 | Y | BEd | N |
| June | Child | 13 | 17 | BEd 4 units | N | French |
| Iris | Adult | 7 | 9 | Yes | N | Bahasa Indonesia Spanish |
| Adele | Adult | 17 | 18 | Grd Dip RSA | N | Italian |
| Karen | Adult | 16 | 20 | BEd major | N | N |
| Dean | Adult | 26 | 26 | Grd Cert, RSA | N | Dutch French German |
| Ngaire | Adult | 8 | 10 | RSA, Grd Dip | N | Hungarian |
| Kate | Adult | 11 | 14 | Grd Cert | N | French |

The average ESL teaching experience across the sample was 11.4 years not including other teaching experience. Most of the teachers had undertaken further study and/or completed post-graduate qualifications relevant to ESL. All the teachers had participated in some form of in-service professional development related to ESL. As Table 1 indicates, the majority of teachers speak at least one other language. This is more prevalent in the ESL teachers of adults where only two of the ten teachers did not speak another language whereas, among the teachers of children, half had another language.

The students they taught came from a very wide range of language and cultural backgrounds. In the primary school classes the range of language backgrounds varied from 5 to 12 different languages in a class. The children were either recent arrivals in Australia or came from homes in which English was not the language of communication. In the adult classes the range of L1s in a class was from 4 to 13. The adult students were in Australia for a variety of reasons reflected in their migrant status (refugee, business, temporary, or student residency). The number of students in the classes ranged from 10 to 23 (M = 16.68). Table 2 indicates the range of languages spoken by child and adult students in the teachers' classes.

## METHOD: DATA-GATHERING PROCEDURE

Teachers' professional knowledge (including principles) becomes embedded in their action and this 'knowledge in action' is not always directly accessible to them (Calderhead 1988: 3). Teachers may find it hard to articulate the principles underlying their practice, therefore data collection was based upon a sequence of observation and particular elicitation techniques, not only so that triangulation could be achieved, but also that a genuine dialogue between researcher and teacher could develop and probe more deeply as it progressed. The data were obtained from the 18 teachers and their classes by a team of five researchers in order to facilitate this more personal dialogic process. Two researchers divided the eight primary school ESL teachers between them, while the ten teachers of adults were divided between three researchers. Throughout the period of intense data collection over an average of five weeks, a reflective process was undertaken between individual teachers and a researcher that had the following characteristics:

- The teacher's own description of any observed practice was sought.
- Elicitation techniques within interviews were conducted in as conversational a manner as possible and the teacher's own words constituted the primary data.
- The researcher avoided making any judgement statements—even if directly asked to—beyond expressions of approval for information provided.
- The researcher checked understanding of information given by 'mirroring' teacher statements and by subsequently seeking their confirmation in a number of different ways at different times.

*Table 2: Languages spoken by adult and child learners in the classes*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Afghani | Croatian | Indonesian | Polish | Swahili |
| Amharic | Danish | Iranian | Portuguese | Swedish/ |
| Arabic | Dinka | Israeli | Romanian | Danish* |
| Bosnian | Dutch | Japanese | Russian | Tagalog |
| Bosnian/ | Farsi | Khmer | Serb/Croat | Tamil |
| Croat* | Filipino | Korean | Serbian | Thai |
| Bulgarian | German | Latvian | Shona | Tigrinya |
| Burmese | German/ | Kurdish | Slovenian/ | Turkish |
| Cambodian | English* | Macedonian | Serbian* | Urdu |
| Cantonese | German/ | Mandarin | Somali | Vietnamese |
| Catalan | Polish* | Marathi | Spanish | Visayan |
| Chinese | Hindi | | Sinhala/Tamil* | |

*Speaks both

The priority was to seek the *teachers'* descriptions and interpretations of their own actions rather than relying upon researcher observation and interpretation. Although the researcher observed classroom practice and took field notes, the purpose was to reflect these back during interviews as a stimulus for teacher commentary and elucidation. The investigation therefore strongly relied upon how teachers described what they did in particular lessons—even if the researcher was present—and upon the ways in which they explained why they did certain things. The overall data-gathering process itself inevitably entailed the co-construction of data by teachers and researchers. However, the imperative throughout this stage of the research was to obtain data representing as direct access as possible to the teachers' own constructions of their work. The step by step process of data collection was as follows.

## Initial meeting

Volunteers from among teachers in a number of schools and adult migrant education centres were sought on the basis of the provision of initial information about the investigation. Each of the volunteering teachers was then contacted directly by the researcher who would be working with them. An initial meeting was set up at the teacher's place of work during which the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the planned sequence of class observation and interviews in which teacher and researcher would be involved. (Three of an original group of 21 volunteers withdrew from the

investigation at this point due to other commitments that they felt would make the planned procedure difficult for them.)

## First observation and interview

All class observations were followed immediately by an interview, with each interview lasting approximately one hour. It was important that both the actual ways they worked and their reasons why they did things in the class were still fresh in the minds of the teachers. All retrospective descriptions of an event are inevitably reconstructions but, given our concern for the meanings teachers gave to their work, we had little choice but to rely on their overt interpretations of it as close to the event as possible. All interviews were audio-recorded. Observations were held at times that the teacher nominated.

In this first observation, the researcher focused upon the practices adopted by the teacher in terms of the ways they worked with the students and the tasks they required of the students. During the subsequent interview, the teacher was asked to describe what they did and what the students did during the lesson as it proceeded. Where prompting seemed necessary, the researcher mentioned things that they had observed in order to seek the teacher's confirmation and interpretation of what had happened. As the teacher spoke, the researcher wrote down each separate practice as described by the teacher on a separate 4 by 2 inches blank card. The researcher then enquired as to how usual the practices were in the teacher's work and if there were additional practices that they often adopted but did not occur in the lesson. From this procedure, the teachers each identified between eight to a dozen of their classroom practices that they also regarded as typical. Taking each of the cards on which a practice was written in turn, the researcher asked the teacher for *the reasons* they would give for each practice. The researcher wrote down on a separate card each reason as worded by the teacher. A single practice most often generated more than one reason whilst, as they moved through the practices, the teacher sometimes recalled one or more of those reasons that had been provided for earlier practices. From this second step in the procedure, the teachers typically offered 7–10 reasons. The outcome from the interview, therefore, was two sets of cards that were inscribed with (a) the teacher's descriptions of actual practices and (b) reasons for those practices in the teachers' own words. At the end of the interview, the researcher gave the teacher a bio-data questionnaire from which the information in Tables 2 and 3 would later be compiled.

## Second interview

The uncovering of the teachers' principles was built upon a grid procedure used by Munby (1984), Russell and Munby (1991), Cronin-Jones and Shaw (1992), and Day (1996) in their work with teachers of maths and science. Prior to the second interview the researcher drew up a grid for each individual

teacher, transcribing the teacher's descriptions of practices and their reasons for them from the cards. The teacher's practices were listed on the vertical axis and their reasons listed on the horizontal axis. Part of an example grid is illustrated in Figure 2.

At this second interview the researcher worked with the teacher on the grid eliciting information as to whether the teacher saw a relationship between each action in turn and all the reasons on the vertical axis. (A strong relationship was rated '1', a weak relationship '2' and no relationship '3'.) Subsequent to this, and prior to the third interview, the researcher analysed the grid to trace correlations between particular patterns of relationships.

At the end of this second interview, the researcher asked the teacher to nominate any aspect of classroom practice which the researcher should focus upon during the second observed lesson and which they could discuss in the interview subsequent to that lesson. The researcher also asked the teacher to write a short account of a 'critical incident' in their teaching that had

| | ***Reasons for Actions*** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Actions*** | Quieter students should have a chance to speak/ use the language | Students should do things they like doing if they think it's useful for learning | Student's contributions are important for confidence and motivation | Need to simplify or break down the task to give a sense of progress | Build on what students already know |
| Begins the lesson by revising work from previous lesson | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Accepts and encourages students' spontaneous suggestions | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Encourages students to write down new items of language | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Gets students to highlight words on the handout | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| Expects students to speak in English in the pair work | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| Gets some students to sound out individual words that are new | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

**NOTE:** For Kate, 1 indicates a strong relationship, 2 a weak relationship and 3 no relationship between an action and a reason. Kate's full grid had 15 reasons on the horizontal axis and 11 actions on the vertical axis.

*Figure 2: Part of Kate's grid*

particular significance for them. A critical incident was described to them as an important incident or occurrence in their teaching experience that could be related more broadly to their teaching or to student learning. Examples of types of incidents given to the teachers included: 'An incident where your action really made a difference in the learner's outcome, either directly or indirectly'; 'An incident where things did not go as planned', or 'An incident that was typical and rewarding'. The purpose of both the focused second observation and the teacher's 'critical incident' would be to encourage the teacher's reflections on these as a means to confirming or elaborating upon the data on underlying principles that would begin to emerge from the upcoming discussion of the patterns in the grid.

## Second observation and subsequent third interview

Throughout the second lesson, the researcher observed and took field notes on that aspect of the teacher's practice that the teacher specified in advance. Immediately after the lesson, the researcher showed the teacher the pattern of relationships analysed from the grid of practices and reasons. From this analysis and using the original cards from which the grid was constructed, the researcher pointed out to the teacher particular practices around which clustered reasons that had a strong relationship to it. Using the cards of each practice and its related set of reasons, the teacher was asked to give a phrase or sentence to express or thematize the relationship. In this way, they articulated a particular principle that appeared to them to *underlie* the relationship and which they identified as an important guide to their classroom work. The researcher wrote down each of these principles on a third set of blank cards using the teacher's own words. When the process was complete, the teacher was asked to read through the new set of cards and make any changes on them. Then she was asked, on reflection, to lay them out in an order that represented her own priorities as a teacher of the language. Figure 3 illustrates how one of the teachers, Kate, thematized her practices and clusters of reasons (partly listed in her grid in Figure 2) in this way. The principles she deduced are laid out in the order of priority which she subsequently gave to them.

In the second part of the interview, with the thematized principles laid out in front of them, the researcher discussed with the teacher the particular practice that she had asked to be the focus for observation during the preceding lesson. The researcher checked the extent to which the practice was typical of the teacher's work and why she regarded it as significant in her work at the present time. The teacher was also asked which of the principles that the practice most directly expressed. The researcher then read the teacher's account of a 'critical incident' and explored why she regarded it as particularly important for her. Again, during this conversation, the researcher asked which of the teacher's principles written on the cards had been influenced by, or was a reflection of, the critical incident in their teaching.

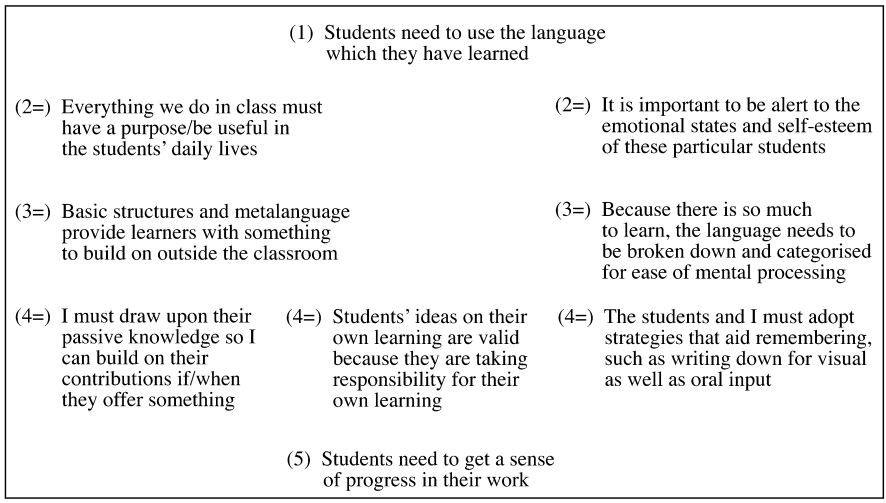


*Figure 3: Kate's pedagogic principles in her order of priority*

Through both these discussions, the teacher confirmed, adapted or elaborated upon those principles that had emerged from the analysis, discussion, and thematization of the information on the grid.

Finally, the researcher agreed with the teacher when a video-recording could be made of one of her lessons. The teacher was free to video-record any lesson she wished before the fourth interview which would be a week or so later. (If the institution in which the teacher worked did not have video-recording equipment, this was provided by the researcher.) The teacher was also asked to view the recording before the next interview with the aim of describing what was happening and/or drawing the researcher's attention to any aspect of the lesson she wished to discuss during the subsequent interview.

## Fourth interview

Teacher and researcher viewed the video-recorded lesson during which the teacher indicated a number of key features or incidents. As the lesson proceeded or at moments the teacher wished to highlight, the researcher explored further those aspects of the lesson that may have been typical of the teacher's usual ways of working and/or may have illustrated the principles on which the work was based. In this way, initiated by the teacher's explanation and interpretation of events during the lesson, further information was obtained on the relationships between the individual teacher's principles and practices.

Prior to this interview, in order to mirror and confirm what the teacher had so far articulated in discussions with the researcher, the researcher had

written a 3–5 page description of the teacher in the third person, based directly on the main or recurring practices so far observed by the researcher and described by the teacher, and on the principles expressed in the teacher's own words in the previous interview. On a separate page, the researcher had then drawn a draft diagram or model of classroom pedagogy directly on the basis of the teacher's prioritized principles as identified in the second part of that interview. Subsequent to the discussion of the video-recorded lesson, the researcher gave the teacher the third person description and asked them to read it before their next and final meeting and to make any changes to it that they wished. In the final part of the interview, the researcher showed the teacher the model of classroom pedagogy and asked for comments on its accuracy or for changes or additions that the teacher felt would more accurately reflect their own pedagogy. Both the third person description and the model of pedagogy were presented to the teacher in order to clarify and confirm the researcher's understanding of the relationships between practices and principles and as stimuli for further information on this relationship. Figure 4 provides the final agreed version of the model drawn up during discussion between the researcher and the teacher whose principles were earlier identified in Figure 3.

As with Kate's model, all the individual teacher's models of their principles and the links between them were distinct and unique to that teacher. In her original thematizing of principles, Kate gave highest priority to language use in the classroom that also had a purpose in students' lives beyond the class. Six of Kate's nine major principles identified both student needs and the potential of students' contributions to their learning. Two further principles to which Kate gave high priority related to making the new language accessible. In reflecting on her principles, Kate re-drew the draft model so that its final version would emphasize that her main responsibilities were to recognize student needs, respond to student contributions, and create classroom activities that would facilitate the accessibility of the language as competencies.

## Fifth interview

In this final meeting, the teacher brought back the third person description of their work with any required changes. Almost all the teachers were surprised how accurate an account had been written about them. Some of them offered amendments or elaborations on what had been written. The researcher showed the adapted final version of the teacher's model of classroom pedagogy for confirmation of its accurate reflection. Both documents were then taken away by the researcher, any further changes requested by the teacher were made, and a final copy was subsequently sent to the teacher concerned.

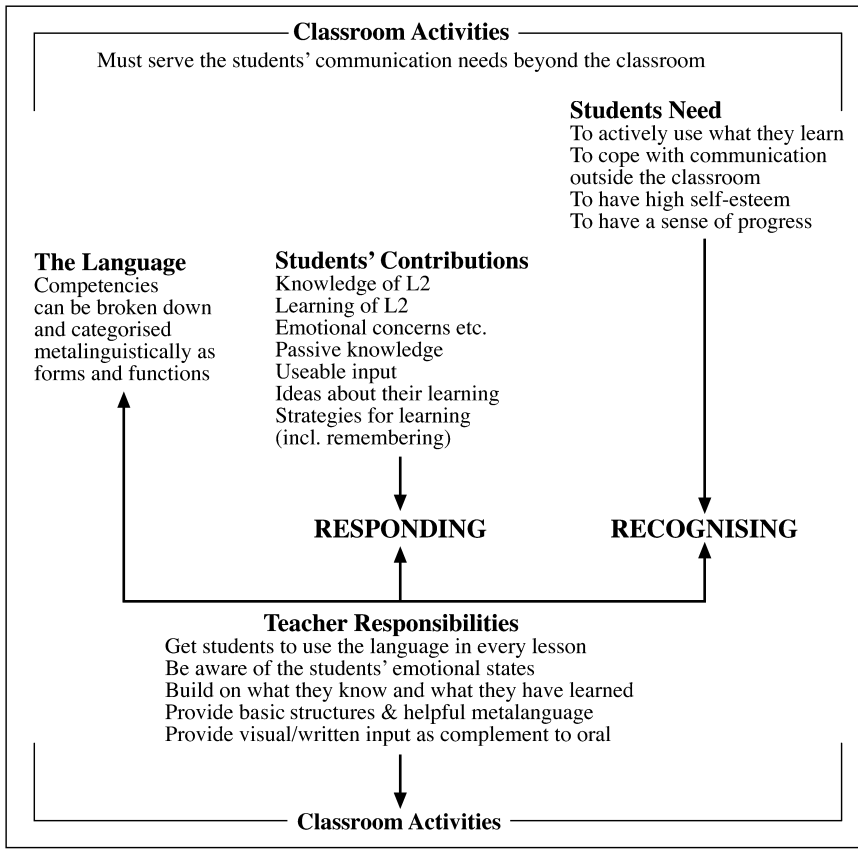


*Figure 4: A model of Kate's principles for language classroom pedagogy*

## ANALYSIS

The five researchers exchanged all the data on principles as recorded in each of the teacher's expressed and prioritized list of principles from the third interview (illustrated in Figure 3) and in their models of classroom pedagogy from the fourth interview (illustrated in Figure 4). These data revealed almost 200 principles thematized by the 18 teachers. Initially we noticed several principles that appeared similar but were worded slightly differently by the teachers, and we chose to group them in a way that would help closer analysis. Building upon earlier categorizations of teachers' knowledge and concerns (Hall and Hoard 1987; Shulman 1987; Pajares 1992) and previous studies of language teachers' conceptualizations of their work (Brindley 1984; Breen 1991; Burns 1992; Woods 1996; Richards 1998) we adopted five broad superordinate categories of teacher concern within which we, independently

of each other, listed the principles of the particular teachers with whom we had worked directly. The five superordinate categories were:

1 a concern with how the learner undertakes the learning process;
2 a concern with particular attributes of the learner;
3 a concern with how to use the classroom and its human and material resources to optimize learning;
4 a concern with the subject matter of learning—with what is being taught and learned;
5 a concern with the specific contributions that they can make in their role as teacher.

Within this broad framework, we subsequently and, again independently, analysed all the principles of all 18 teachers in relation to each of these concerns in order to check the reliability of the categories we had adopted. Exchanging our analyses we found at least 80% reliability between the five of us in our identification of particular principles with specific categories of concern. This process, relying on a fairly loose rather than constraining framework, enabled a subsequent identification of those principles, both within and across the categories, that appeared to us to be closely related or even very similar and those that appeared distinctive. It also enabled us to identify some principles which we were obliged to recategorize and that required further analysis which we undertook together. The analysis of principles therefore led to the reduction of the initial diverse range to more finite sets of principles that could be seen to be closely related and, in several cases, very similar.

We also exchanged data from the individual teachers on their repertoires of practices. These data therefore derived from their descriptions that had been transferred to the grid and from subsequent recorded interviews. Almost 300 classroom practices had been identified by the teachers, many of which appeared similar but were sometimes described in different terms. We did not categorize the practices. Each of us drew up individual profiles of each of the teachers with whom we had worked directly in which we listed those principles articulated by each teacher and, alongside each principle, those practices that they claimed to express or reflect the particular principle. Each individual profile therefore revealed the links that the teacher made between main principles and related practices (example profiles are in Tables 3 and 4 in the following section.) As with all the data provided in our work with the teachers, we tried to take the teachers' wording at face value in drawing up the individual profiles from the position that an evaluative analysis of what the teachers described and claimed was not appropriate for our immediate purpose in uncovering the relationships *they* identified between what they did during teaching and their principled basis for this.

In order to trace the nature of these relationships across all 18 teachers, all the profiles were analysed. The principles most commonly articulated by most of the teachers were identified and, subsequently, all the practices that

individual teachers identified with each shared principle were listed. To confirm this relationship, the reverse process was undertaken. From all the most widely used practices in the individual profiles, all the principles that the teachers related to such practices were traced and listed. From this process, possible relationships between shared principles and particular classroom practices could be uncovered across the whole sample.

## FINDINGS

The central focus in this paper is the relationship, for a particular group of teachers of language, between the underlying pedagogic rationale that they claimed to guide their work and their actions in the classroom. In other words, following Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990, 1991), does a particular common disposition among this professional group entail specific working practices or is such a disposition realized through a diversity of practices? Furthermore, as the study focused upon teachers in a particular situation, the principles they articulated and the priority they gave to them are also likely to reflect the ways in which the teachers, as individuals and as a group, made particular sense of the specific demands of that situation. If, across the group, there emerged a divergent relationship between principles and practices, then individual teachers would appear to be making sense of their role as a language teacher within an outwardly similar situation in different ways. On the other hand, if a commonly shared disposition was related to a *specific* set of widely adopted practices, then the teachers could be seen to be making sense of their role in terms of a particular collective pedagogy within that particular situation.

In order to explore these issues, we will first consider findings derived from individual teachers. This will also serve to illustrate the data on which the account of the whole group of teachers was based. It is fair to anticipate that, given the diversity among the sample of teachers in, at least, language learning background, prior training, years of experience, and age of students being taught—as indicated in Table 1 earlier—the individual teacher may reveal a principle and practice relationship that is distinctive. Subtleties in conceptualizations of practice of the individual teacher may be hidden in any broader analysis across a sample of teachers (Bramald *et al.* 1995).

### The principles and practices of the individual teacher

Here we present briefly the profiles of two teachers from the sample, one of whom teaches adult students and one of whom teaches child ESL learners. Both of them had over 6 years' experience in ESL teaching at the time of the study and both had over 10 years' teaching experience in addition to ESL work.

At the time of the study, Ngaire had worked with adult ESL learners for 8 years. She teaches five mornings a week at an adult migrant education centre.

The class is fairly typical in having 20 adult students of different ages recently arrived in Australia from nine different countries. Ngaire regards the class as being at the lower end of proficiency, from Beginner to Low Intermediate. On the basis of all the data obtained with Ngaire, Table 3 is a profile of the main principles on which she operated and the practices that she claimed to express these principles.

As with each individual teacher in the sample, Ngaire's profile is relatively

*Table 3: The profile of Ngaire's main principles and the practices she identified with them*

| Principles | Practices |
|---|---|
| Breaking the information down makes it easier to understand and product later. | At the start of each lesson, explains as explicitly as possible the linguistic expressions of various functions/types of utterances. Gives examples of appropriate vocabulary or sentences in a step by step fashion, gradually building up to full sentences or utterances. Provides handouts that list or exemplify appropriate vocabulary, sentence types, utterance types. |
| If students write things down, this helps understanding, consolidation, and revision for later assessment. | Students are asked to write things down during or after the input which they will then use in the subsequent oral activity such as a role play. |
| It is important for students to hear input more than once and hearing each other speak helps them to remember by hearing things in different ways. | Repeats new input and encourages students to rehearse it individually or in chorus.<br>Students share out oral responses (e.g. from a written dialogue) with the whole class. |
| The teacher needs to take account of the differences between students and how they learn. | While students are writing down new items, structures, etc., she tries to see as many individuals in the class to check understanding and give feedback on correctness. |
| Students want to know how they're going to be assessed—i.e. against the Competencies framework. | Focuses upon the Competencies syllabus taking each one as a lesson topic and builds each lesson on (1) the particular functions of language within that competency (requesting, recounting, etc.) and (2) particular genres such as the structure of a report or narrative.<br>Identifies items of vocabulary or sentence forms and functions in handouts for revision. |
| Students need to know the correct forms and uses of language in our society. | Provides a good deal of modelling and repetition as lessons unfolds.<br>Ongoing feedback to students on basis of accuracy and appropriacy. |

unique in the words she used to articulate her principles, her order of priority among principles, how she described her practices and the permutation of practices she identified with each principle. However, at the level of principle, Ngaire shared with several of the teachers of adults a concern with making formal aspects of the language manageable for learning and, to achieve this, adopting a range of practices in how they presented it. Given the diversity of linguistic and educational backgrounds of participants in their classrooms, many of the teachers of adults were alert to individual differences and Ngaire expressed this with particular reference to how the students learned. Adult migrant provision entails close assessment of attainment at the end of the allotted period of free language lessons and a new system of assessment based upon a profile of competencies in spoken and written English is part of the responsibility of each teacher. Ngaire, as did several of her colleagues teaching adults, expressed a strong concern with her students' progress in relation to the competencies and explicitly built each of her lessons upon aspects of them. She asserted her own keenness for the students to master correct aspects of the language in efficient ways—again a principle that she shared with some of the other teachers of adults.

At the time of the study, Sue had taught ESL to school-age children for 6 years and, in addition, had 27 years' experience teaching children in a variety of schools and situations. She works in an intensive language centre for recently arrived migrant children which, typically in such centres, has relatively small class sizes. At the time, Sue taught a middle primary class of 10 students from five different countries. The principles to which she gave priority and the practices identified with them are indicated in Table 4.

Clearly, Sue's profile is different from Ngaire's although there are some overlaps in the principles concerned with correct forms and with assessing progress. Even regarding the latter, however, Ngaire saw the students as needing to know how they would eventually be assessed while Sue identifies her checking of progress with both students' understanding of a task and the need 'to know where they're at' for herself. In terms of practices, both rely on modelling correct forms and working with students individually during tasks. The main differences between Ngaire and Sue are in the latter's concern with her students' affective comfort and involvement, their social behaviour, and relating language work directly to other school subjects; three concerns she shares with many of the teachers of ESL children. Most of them articulated principles that acknowledged the significant emotional and social adaptation required of recently migrating children and that a key responsibility of the teacher is to prepare such children in explicit ways for mainstream education. A fairly common guiding principle for this sub-group of teachers was to encourage independence and responsibility for one's own learning. However, even compared with other teachers of children, Sue's profile remains distinct in her particular articulation of principles and practices, the principles to which she gave priority, and in the repertoire of practices she identified with each principle.

*Table 4: The profile of Sue's main principles and the practices she identified with them*

| Principles | Practices |
|---|---|
| Learners must take responsibility for their own learning. | Encourages and, at times, insists that students do things for themselves.<br>Explicitly teaches students, particularly boys, to manage themselves. |
| Students need to feel happy and secure in order to learn English.<br>Must develop learner confidence and self esteem. | She continually values students' attempts.<br>Provides lots of positive feedback.<br>Approaches individual students with good humour and encouraging remarks. |
| Need to teach both the meaning and correct form of English. | Teaches new vocabulary in a variety of ways.<br>Encourages students to practice vocabulary.<br>Models English sentence forms both orally and in writing.<br>Gives opportunities for collaborative work and negotiation among peers in actrivities. |
| Promotes an understanding and transfer concepts from L1. | Uses tasks that have mainstream (primary level) content but develops the content/conceptual knowledge through inductive tasks. |
| Develop acceptable behaviour in the classroom. | Structures the class to reduce intimidation from peers and to maximize participation from every member of the class. |
| It is important to know where the learners are at. | Constantly supervises individual students as they work on tasks.<br>Shares turns so that she can hear or see how each learner is understanding.<br>Checks to see if students know what they're doing.<br>Checks to see if students have the correct English form in writing. |

Our comparison of the profiles of all 18 teachers, as with Ngaire and Sue, indicated that the teachers shared some similar principles but not others. In addition, Ngaire shared certain principles with several teachers of adults which seemed to distinguish them from Sue and many of the other teachers of children. Even given these overlaps, each teacher identified and described individual repertoires of practices—some of which may have been shared but many not so—that expressed different configurations of guiding principles. The 18 teachers in the study therefore appeared to differ in selective reliance on particular practices, the relative emphasis they gave to them, and—crucially—the framework of principles on which such actions were based. In

terms of the relationship between the principles and practices of the individual teacher, given a teacher's wish to create coherence for themselves in how they think and act in their daily professional work, and given the sequence of research procedures adopted here wherein teachers deduced their principles from instances of practice, it may be expected that the teachers would identify a strong internal relationship that, for them, was consistent. What is significant from this study, however, is that the nature of the relationship for the individual teacher appears to be different in both substance and pattern from that of another teacher even working with similar students in the same institution.

However, might the ESL teachers *as a group*, regardless of the differences in teaching circumstances, including differences between the students whom they teach, reveal an overall, collective pattern in relationships between widely shared principles and particular repertoires of teaching practices? We might justifiably anticipate this on the basis of similarities in training the teachers undertook, in the subject matter they teach, the language learning process which they are managing, and that they are members of a particular profession which, like other professions, has developed its own current ideology.

## From a shared principle to particular practices

From the profiles of all 18 teachers, a widely shared principle can be identified and traced to the practices which the teachers claimed to adopt as active expressions of that principle. Across the group, although sometimes voiced by them in different terms, there were a dozen principles that were common to the majority of the teachers. One of these can be summarized as: *taking account of individual differences between students and/or the specific characteristics of individual students.* Most of the teachers in the study claimed that this principle guided their work and some regarded it as a very high priority in their pedagogy. Table 5 lists all those practices which they individually identified as implementing this principle. What is revealed is that, across the sample of teachers, they justified over 30 mostly distinct classroom practices with this concern for individual differences.

A reading of the listed practices reveals that, although some may be similar in nature, the majority appear to be quite different despite being linked by the teachers to a common concern. The range of practices in Table 5 suggest that most of the teachers differentially operationalized this concern. There also appears to be a partial variation between teachers of adults as compared with teachers of children in how individual differences were addressed. Despite the wider range of practices of the ten teachers of adults as compared with the eight teachers of children, not every teacher of adults regarded attention to individual differences as a high priority, whilst virtually all of the teachers of children did. Whilst being familiar with the emotional experiences of new arrivals, both in terms of the conditions they may have left behind them and

*Table 5: Teachers' practices identified with the teachers' principle of accounting for individual differences*

*Practices of teachers of adults*

- Shows interest in students' personal lives; e.g. asked about a student's relative who was sick.
- Accepts all students' responses without saying they're wrong: 'You would be understood, but a better way to say that is . . .'
- Integrates within lessons items needed for competencies to be covered in the term.
- Assesses students individually when they say they are ready.
- Goes from individual to individual during desk work to check understanding or correctness.
- Makes worksheets on same topic but at different levels.
- Links vocabulary/concepts back to students' culture/experience (e.g. 'gnome': do they have similar creatures in their culture?).
- Models orally and on board as visual support.
- Uses colours to mark inflections of works on board.
- Uses variety of resources: video, tapes, & workbook exercises.
- Accompanies oral input with written, pictorial, diagrammatic, input using colour coding.
- Uses videos, real experiences, tapes, gesture, mime, groupwork.
- Listens to everyone, asks their opinions, asks when they want a break.
- Incompleted homework, inability to do a task, or being late to class not admonished by the teacher(s).
- Pairs stronger person with one with less developed English.
- Negotiates breaks and outings.
- Explains detailed rules, exceptions, generalizations.
- Much input to whole class, especially feedback when groups reporting back.
- Chooses topic that is seen as relevant to students' daily lives ('fast foods').
- Corrects sentences in students' writing.
- Uses students' names to illustrate comparative/superlative forms of adjectives.
- Chooses topics that are 'jazzy/groovy' to suit 18–20 age group.
- Video replay of students' own oral presentations.
- Adopts informal, non-authoritarian manner.
- Explains how a person could take a book from the local library.
- Gets feedback from students on their community involvement (e.g. conversations with other parents at their children's school).

*Practices of teachers of children*

- Encourages risk-taking; 'having a go'.
- Values learners' different attempts.
- Provides much positive feedback to all contributions from students.
- Uses humour in approaching/talking about individual students.
- Extends the contributions of more advanced students & organizes peer-support activities so more advanced help less advanced students.
- Modifies program to work at appropriate level for each student's needs.
- Provides individual attention as required.
- Encouraged students to share & discuss background knowledge.
- Students encouraged to input about their countries of origin (e.g. about water supply).
- Public attention given to a student—addressing by name & praising him.
- Assesses students informally during desk work in each lesson to check understanding of the language &/or concepts.
- Constantly circulates around class working with each learner.
- Checks students' understanding & production to make sure students know what they are doing & also provides feedback.

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the challenge of becoming members of a new culture, teachers of adults tended to see difference in terms of proficiency levels and learning styles. Teachers of children, on the other hand, regarded ESL children as a distinct group from mainstream primary non-ESL students with additional emotional and educational needs that were assumed by the teachers as specific to each child. Therefore some of the variation in practices adopted by the two groupings of teachers may be explained by the age of the students whom they teach. Nevertheless, across the whole sample, those practices claimed to take account of individual differences reveal a diverse pattern and, in this respect, echo the earlier finding regarding the individual teacher.

Does this differential implementation apply *across* principles? A second very widely shared principle was that of enabling their students to best remember and recall what is taught. In other words, what is to be learned should be made easier for students to store in memory either by their own actions or those of the teacher. Table 6 identifies, across the whole sample, those actions observed in lessons and described by individual teachers as seeking to achieve this.

As Table 6 indicates, the teachers as a group specified 24 mostly distinctive practices which they related to this principle. We can see that, as a slightly larger group, teachers of adults appeared more concerned with this principle and adopted a wider range of practices than did teachers of children. However, what is particularly significant to the present analysis is that, of the 39 practices claimed to account for individual differences listed earlier in

*Table 6: Teachers' practices identified with the teachers' stated principle of enabling students to remember and recall new information*

*Practices of teachers of adults*

- At start of lesson explains explicity form & functions of language to be focused on.
- Exemplifies appropriate vocabulary/sentences working step by step from word to sentences.
- Provides and explains handouts which list & exemplify vocabulary & sentence or utterance types.
- Students encouraged to write down oral input from the teacher and supportive visual input from the board.
- Reviews previous lesson at start of current lesson by hearing input from students.
- Students undertake homework for consolidation of the lesson.
- Students told to mark with highlighers any problems identified in handout.
- Students advised to write things down that they'll need in later dialogue/role play activity.
- Students encouraged to chorally repeat & drill pronunciation.
- Students do dictation.
- Requires repeated listening to tape.
- Gives memory test of particular objects dealt with in previous topic.
- Repeats new input & students orally rehearse it.
- Students share oral responses/dialogues with whole class after group task.
- Uses repetition and emphatic intonation on focused input.
- Provides synonyms alongside new work.
- Writes all new words on board.
- Explains meaning & several usages of new word.
- Makes explicit links to homework/recapitulates previous lesson.

*Practices of teachers of children*

- Provides opportunities to hear & practice correct usage.
- Points out recurrence in new input material of previously learned vocabulary ('metamorphosis'; 'proboscis').
- Encourages students to use previously learned words in new activity.
- Uses mainstream content but calls upon students' knowledge of concepts from L1.
- Closely monitors students' understanding and production.

Table 5, only four types of practice appear to overlap with those expressing a concern with students' memory and recall as in Table 6. First, explicit explanation of formal features of language was referred to once in relation to accounting for individual differences and three times in relation to enabling memorization. Second, the use of visual support for new information, such as writing on the board, was referred to three times in accounting for individual differences and twice for student memorization purposes. Third, student oral presentation to the whole class was referred to once in relation to each concern. And, fourth, teacher's personal monitoring of individual student's desk work was referred to three times in accounting for individual differences and twice in enabling memorization.

An important pattern is revealed in these data and confirmed in comparing other principles that were widely shared across the group. Of a total of 63 practices identified by the teachers with the two principles here described, only eight practices expressing one principle and eight expressing the other can be seen to be very similar. It has to be emphasized that any similar practices across the two principles were those of different teachers. Therefore, synthesizing the whole-group data on practices reveals only a very small degree of overlap between practices that the 18 teachers related to one principle as compared to those they related to another.

Analysing the data obtained from the whole group of teachers, therefore, suggests a particular pattern in the relationships between principles and practices that is less random than that for the individual teacher and, quite possibly, across a smaller sample of teachers. It appears that a different shared principle will be expressed through a mostly *different set* of practices. Figure 5 illustrates this kind of relationship where a principle that is common across a group of teachers is realized through a particular repertoire of classroom practices that is mostly distinctive from those practices through which the teachers implement another shared principle.

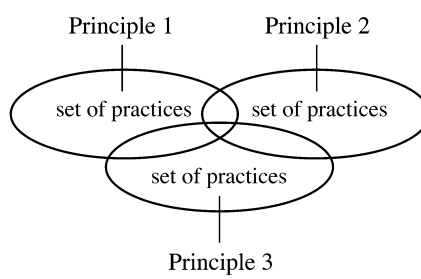


*Figure 5: Relationships between principles and practices across a group of teachers*

## From a common practice to particular principles

To further confirm this more consistent pattern of relationship across the group, we also analysed the teachers' profiles working in reverse from the many practices they described to the principles with which they identified them. To briefly illustrate this, we here refer to two widely implemented practices that were observed in every classroom and, at some point, in virtually every lesson in the study: first, the use of pair or group work and, second, explicit modelling or explanation of aspects of language.

As a group, the 18 teachers justified the use of pair or group work in the class with reference to 23 mostly different principles. Many of the teachers of children appeared to place a high value on what they regarded as supportive group dynamics in the classroom whilst teachers of adults tended to attribute pair or group work with the opportunity for student consolidation of more formal aspects of the language. They therefore generally saw it as addressing immediate language development needs within the classroom group. Teachers of children never explicitly mentioned this. For them, joint student activity had a significant socializing function wherein collaborative student activity was seen to serve longer-term educational and societal goals.

The second very common practice of explicit teacher modelling and explanation was justified across the 18 teachers on the basis of 29 principles, again mostly different. Significantly, of the 23 principles that the teachers identified with pair and group work only nine identical or very similar principles were identified with modelling and explanation. Therefore, two very common practices were separately related to over 50 mostly different principles, less than a quarter of which were the same across these practices. Again, this relatively small proportion of overlap also occurred when comparing other most commonly used practices of all the teachers. As practices were less and less shared, overlaps between principles underlying them disappeared. Therefore, regarding the teachers as a group, the pattern of relationship revealed earlier in working from a principle to practices was confirmed. First, a particular classroom practice widely adopted by the group was identified with a diverse set of principles. Second, one common practice could be traced to a *specific* cluster of principles that revealed little overlap with the cluster of principles that the teachers collectively attributed to another common practice.

In addition to its diagrammatic representation as in Figure 5 above, this systematic relationship might be described, with appropriate caution, through a scientific metaphor, wherein a principle functions like the nucleus of an atom with particular practices orbiting as electrons. A second distinct atom (principle) is itself orbited by different types of electrons (practices). However, a small proportion of the electrons may be common to both atoms. In other words, it seems fair to claim that, despite individual differences in dispositions to think and act in seemingly diverse ways, when we uncover the pedagogic principles of a particular *group* of ESL teachers, having a similar background

experience and working in a similar context, then a complex but seemingly consistent relationship emerges between widely adopted classroom practices and specific clusters of principles.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This paper has offered an account of a particular research procedure in which 18 experienced teachers, individually participating in a close dialogue over an intense period of investigation with a researcher, described observed classroom practices and, through a process of gradual elicitation, articulated their own pedagogic principles on which the practices were based. As a group, the 18 teachers described over 300 practices through confirmation of researcher observations immediately after lessons. In studies of language teachers to date, this kind of identification of practices as close as possible to their situated occurrence is rare. On this basis, a gradual elicitation procedure uncovered almost 200 underlying principles. Again, the elicitation of teacher conceptualizations of their work *directly* addressed to instances of actual behaviour is unusual in studies of language teachers. A surprisingly small proportion of both types of data were articulated in identical or very similar ways across the group of teachers. However, a subsequent analysis, entailing high inter-rater reliability across five researchers, identified a finite range of principles that were widely shared across the group of teachers. These were then traced to those practices that individual teachers identified with them, thereby revealing the pattern of relationships for both the individual and the group that has been described in this paper. The data from the teachers in this study suggest that actual relationships are quite complex. We may summarize these in the following ways:

1 The individual teacher appears to have a personal configuration of pedagogic principles that is realized, in selective ways, through a set of favoured practices. On the basis of background knowledge and experience and during further classroom experience, the influence of one upon the other is very likely to be interactive. For the teacher, the relationship between the two is seen as coherent in the sense that a particular principle entails certain practices—and vice versa.
2 A single principle held by the individual teacher may be realized in action through several distinct practices. Conversely, a single practice may be an expression of more than one principle.
3 Experienced teachers appear to differ from each other in the principles they currently hold and the priorities that they attribute to them. Similarly they appear to develop a personal repertoire of tried and favoured practices. Both are personal constructions of their role as a teacher. The relationship between the two thereby evolves, for the individual, as seemingly idiosyncratic as compared to that of another teacher.

4 A group of language teachers of similar experience, working with ESL students in a similar situation are likely to implement a shared principle through a diverse range of different practices.
5 This apparent diversity of practices disguises an underlying pattern in the relationship between a shared principle and a specific *set* of practices. Across the sample of teachers, there appeared to be a particular repertoire of practices that they identified with a shared principle which was largely different from another repertoire of practices identified with a different shared principle.
6 Conversely, a practice commonly adopted by the group of teachers appeared to express, for them, a set of principles which were mostly different from another set of principles justifying a different practice.
7 Therefore, the evidence from this study of experienced language teachers working in a similar situation suggests that, beneath individual diversity in action in the classroom and the personal dispositions that guide it, there appears to be a collective pedagogy wherein a widely adopted classroom practice is, from their perspective, an expression of a *specific* and largely distinctive set of principles.

In discussing these findings, we will briefly address two questions in turn: What is the significance of these findings in relation to teachers' thinking and action in the language classroom? And what does the present study and its findings suggest for future research on language teaching that seeks to understand the process from the perspective of the teacher?

## The significance for language pedagogies

From a theoretical viewpoint, the present study explored the *habitus* of a group of language teachers through a wide range of underlying dispositions that they identified with their work and it confirmed Bourdieu's claim that a multiplicity of practices would be generated by such dispositions (Bourdieu 1980) However, the data also suggest that, despite individual diversity in the teachers' enacting of their role, *as a collective* there is an underlying and consistent pattern between the ways they think about their work and the ways in which they act in the language class. There therefore appears to be a degree of professional consensus along the lines of Bourdieu's *le sens pratique*. Prabhu (1987) suggests that language teachers, through experience, develop understandings of how certain classroom activities lead to desired outcomes in learning and that an experientially informed amalgamation of activities and their related justifications represent a teacher's 'sense of plausibility'. For Prabhu, teachers' actions and their pedagogic rationale evolve in constant inter-relation. In time, what is regarded as plausible become the criteria that the teacher applies to subsequent and possibly varied teaching situations. The present study has shed some light on this inter-related 'sense of plausibility'

both in terms of its individual variation and also in terms of its collective nature.

The findings are also highly relevant to changes that may confront the teacher's 'sense of plausibility'; required changes in aspects of the curriculum or a personal change in teaching situation. Individual teachers gave different priorities to principles and relied on a specific permutation of practices and we may hypothesize that more strongly held principles and favoured practices would be more resilient to adaptation. Nevertheless, given their dynamic relation over time, certain more peripheral principles and less established practices of a teacher may be more open to change. We may further hypothesize that the *extent* of individual adaptation may be constrained within that collective pedagogy wherein certain principles predict specific practices and which the teacher shares with a group of practitioners of similar experience in a similar working environment.

The study provides support for the view that the in-service professional development of language teachers needs to address the particular 'sense of plausibility' of the kind illustrated here. Although the study has uncovered evidence of shared principles and practices and a relationship between certain of these across the group, the diversity between the teachers in the study was greater than we had expected. Teachers talked about their work more often in different ways. It might be that less individual diversity may be revealed through a much closer analysis of their discourse (see below). However, the differences between the individual and the group as revealed in this study have direct relevance for professional development. In addition to addressing on-going change in the demands upon language teachers, it is possible that forms of reflective dialogue of the kind adopted in our research among providers and recipients of in-service courses may explore the actual extent of relatively individualistic constructions of the role of the language teacher as compared with approaches or methods in language teaching that exemplify current 'taken-for-granteds' within the profession.

Concerning the education of novice language teachers, Flowerdew *et al.* (1992) Richards and Lockhart (1994) and Freeman and Richards (1996) have suggested that the ways in which experienced language teachers have framed their actions in the classroom can serve as a source of professional 'know how' that may serve as a focus for initial teacher education. The present study provided evidence of the ways in which such an experienced group constructed language pedagogy. We may consider that the ways in which they did so relate to those principles of language teaching that are presented to the novice by teacher educators, teacher training textbooks, and by the academic applied linguistics community. We might also ask whether, at the present time, there appears to be a particular ideology within the wider language teaching profession that resembles a collective pedagogy of specific principles linked to certain repertoires of practices of the kind suggested by the present study. Alternatively, it may be possible that the diversity between individual teachers, as also revealed here, may indicate the unfolding of

individual interpretations of whatever was common in their prior professional training on the basis of subsequent experience. The present study strongly suggests that, within the framework of a certain broader collective pedagogy, experience generates individual variation in pedagogy. In discussing the nature of expertise, Meichenbaum and Beimiller (1992) highlight research on learning that indicates the difference between the 'novice' and the 'expert' as not merely the amount of knowledge they relatively possess, but in how that knowledge is structured—in the meaningful relationships that the expert has established. Furthermore, experts differ from novices in the ways they *enact* what they know during activity. This presents a problem for the education of novice language teachers, for we may assume that the trainers are themselves experts. Much language teacher education necessarily addresses practice through a focus upon principle. In what ways, however, might the trainer's rationale for a particular practice coincide with the trainee's own principles about teaching derived primarily from their experiences as a learner? Clearly both the dynamic nature of the individual's experiential pedagogy and any evolution in what may be the collective pedagogy of the wider professional community—*and* how these may relate to each other—are significant issues for both teacher education and research on language teaching.

## Research implications

The findings from the study suggest a challenge to studies of teachers' overt classroom behaviours such as patterns of questioning, error treatment, giving feedback or the like. We cannot infer the intentions of teacher action or the reasons why teachers work in the ways they do in particular lessons with particular students only from observed practices. Similarly, the findings also raise questions for research on teacher thinking. We cannot assume or predict the actual classroom behaviour of teachers only from the rationale they provide for the ways they prefer to work through interview or questionnaire data. We cannot deduce language pedagogies on the basis of teachers' accounts of how they work without reflecting with them upon *actual instances* of practice.

The present study revealed that teachers gave priority to certain principles and that a finite set of principles was shared across the group. These findings lend some support to the idea that teachers may frame their work in terms of a hierarchy of principles—perhaps in terms of core, superordinate, or more resilient principles in relation to peripheral, entailed, or context-adaptable principles. The former might exemplify what is common among a group of practitioners in a particular situation; its collective ideology. Research has yet to be undertaken that investigates language teaching in terms of such systematic frameworks of principles held by individuals or particular groups.

This paper necessarily provides a mere snapshot of the teachers' work and how they conceptualized it. The study was constrained in both time and place. While we might anticipate that, with experience, the relationship between a

teacher's principles and practices may become relatively stable, the data derived from the particular teaching context as the teachers interpreted it and their own role within it. It may well be the case that they will further selectively assess the feasibility of certain principles and practices and how these interact as they develop their relationship with a class of learners or if they move to work in a different teaching situation. Ideally, therefore, research on language teaching that seeks to uncover the dynamic nature between classroom work and teacher conceptualization would be longitudinal. Furthermore, a study that compared a group of teachers in different teaching situations would enable us to trace the impact of varying social conditions upon their thinking and action. There is some small evidence of this in the present study wherein teachers of adults appeared to define aspects of their role both in relation to the social needs of their students and in relation to their students' learning outcomes differently from the teachers of children. However, much current research on English language teaching in particular is not comparative in this way and it tends, at least implicitly, to affirm western educational ideologies concerning the relationships between subject matter, teacher, student, and classroom practices. Therefore, there remains significant scope for the kind of work here described to be pursued, not merely with teachers in different social contexts, but also in terms of cross-cultural and inter-cultural studies of language pedagogy.

The teachers' conceptualizations revealed in this study were also shaped by the research procedures adopted over the particular time of the investigation. We deliberately stayed as close as possible to the words actually used by the teachers in describing their practices, their justifications for them, how they thematized and prioritized their principles, and how they later identified relationships between these and on-going practices. The ways in which we asked the teachers to do these things will have both facilitated and constrained the data we obtained. Our research procedure may not have provided access to the full range of principles that guided their pedagogy and, over a more extended period of time, their practices may have been even more diverse than those that were made explicit. The primary research goal was to get as close as possible to how the teachers made sense of their classroom work at the particular time. We relied on teachers' constructions of their actions and thinking through a discourse of reflective questions and elicitation procedures and, in this sense, the data were co-constructed. While the particular research procedures enabled an on-going process of confirmation of the emerging data with each teacher, we were dependent on the ways in which they articulated their own rationale for their actions. The study provides data on the professional discourse of the particular group of teachers but only in the context of our conversations with them. It is possible that, when talking together in informal situations, in staffrooms, in review and planning meetings, and in their own families, teachers may attribute other meanings to their work, and such a broader investigation remains to be done.

The present paper has focused upon teachers' descriptions of, and

justifications for, classroom action. Our purpose has not been to evaluate the data from a critical perspective, although teachers' assumptions about language pedagogy and from whence these may derive may be open to such an analysis. Research with busy practitioners entails the making explicit of one's ultimate purposes and the gradual establishment of trust. A key component of the kind of research we have here described is the ethical relationship between 'insider' practitioner and 'outsider' researcher. The assumed benefits of a more overt critical stance in an analysis of the data we obtain from 'insiders' needs to be balanced with the access we can achieve as researchers to the meanings people genuinely attribute to their actions. The study, in its gradual elicitation procedures, tried to alleviate the problem of the interface between the teacher's voice and researcher interpretation that appears to be inherent in qualitative research on language teaching. The wide variation in the data as between individual teachers suggests that we may have been reasonably successful in getting close to the teacher's perspective. Nevertheless, how we, as researchers, make sense of language teaching *through* the meanings given to it by practitioners remains a challenge to any investigation that seeks a deeper understanding of aspects of language pedagogy. This study has contributed to this agenda by revealing individual diversity framed within a particular pattern of relationships between the thinking and actions of experienced language teachers. It has also pointed to particular ways forward in the investigation of language pedagogy in situations of actual practice.

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