

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Focus on the Language Classroom

An introduction to classroom

research for language teachers

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE LANGUAGE TEACHING LIBRARY

A series covering central issues in language teaching and learning, by authors who have expert knowledge in their field.

In this series:

Affect in Language Learning *edited by Jane Arnold*

Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching *by Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers*

Beyond Training *by Jack C. Richards*

Classroom Decision-Making *edited by Michael Breen and Andrew Littlejohn*

Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers *by Anne Burns*

Collaborative Language Learning and Teaching *edited by David Nunan*

Communicative Language Teaching *by William Littlewood*

Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom *by David Nunan*

Developing Reading Skills *by Françoise Grellet*

Developments in English for Specific Purposes *by Tony Dudley-Evans and Maggie Jo St John*

Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers *by Michael McCarthy*

Discourse and Language Education *by Evelyn Hatch*

English for Academic Purposes *by R. R. Jordan*

English for Specific Purposes *by Tom Hutchinson and Alan Waters*

Establishing Self-Access *by David Gardner and Lindsay Miller*

Foreign and Second Language Learning *by William Littlewood*

Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective *edited by Michael Byram and Michael Fleming*

The Language Teaching Matrix *by Jack C. Richards*

Language Test Construction and Evaluation *by J. Charles Alderson, Caroline Clapham and Dianne Wall*

Learner-centredness as Language Education *by Ian Tudor*

Managing Curricular Innovation *by Numa Markee*

Materials Development in Language Teaching *edited by Brian Tomlinson*

Psychology for Language Teachers *by Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden*

Research Methods in Language Learning *by David Nunan*

Second Language Teacher Education *edited by Jack C. Richards and David Nunan*

Society and the Language Classroom *edited by Hywel Coleman*

Teacher Learning in Language Teaching *edited by Donald Freeman and Jack C. Richards*

Teaching the Spoken Language *by Gillian Brown and George Yule*

Understanding Research in Second Language Learning *by James Dean Brown*

Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy *edited by Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy*

Vocabulary, Semantics, and Language Education *by Evelyn Hatch and Cheryl Brown*

Voices from the Language Classroom *edited by Kathleen M. Bailey and David Nunan*

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright
Lancaster University

Kathleen M. Bailey
*Monterey Institute of International
Studies*

Originally published in the New Directions in Language
Teaching Series, edited by Howard B. Altman and
Peter Strevens



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521262798

© Cambridge University Press 1991

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1991

Tenth printing 2004

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Allwright, Dick

Focus on the language classroom: an introduction to classroom research for
language teachers / Dick Allwright, Kathleen M. Bailey.

p. cm. — (New directions in language teaching)

Include bibliographical references.

ISBN 0 521 26279 8

ISBN 0 521 26909 1 (pbk.)

1. Language and language — Study and teaching.

2. Classroom environment.

I. Bailey, Kathleen M. II. Title. III. Series.

P53.A475 1991

418'.007—dc20 91-4395 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-26909-4 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-26909-1 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2006

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To Peter Strevens

Contents

Acknowledgements	xi
Preface	xiv
Introduction	xvii
Part I Classroom research: what it is and why it is important	1
1 The development of classroom research	2
1.1 What is classroom research?	2
1.2 How is it done?	3
1.3 Where did classroom research come from?	5
1.4 How has it developed?	6
1.5 What has happened to the early concerns?	7
1.6 What has happened to the basic tools?	10
1.7 Summary	14
Discussion starters	15
Suggestions for further reading	15
Mini-project: Sizing up the instruments	16
2 Why focus on the classroom?	18
2.1 The classroom is the crucible	18
2.2 The management of interaction in the classroom	19
2.3 The management of learning in the classroom	21
2.4 Summary	28
Discussion starters	29
Suggestions for further reading	30
Mini-project: Planned aspects and co-produced outcomes	31
Part II Classroom research: principles and procedures	34
3 Getting started – the question of approach	35
3.1 How do you decide what to investigate?	35
3.2 The problem of approach	40
3.3 Reliability, validity, and generalisability	45
3.4 Generalisability and the different approaches to classroom research	50
3.5 Summary	52
Discussion starters	53
Suggestions for further reading	54
Mini-project: A data-driven analysis	55
	vii

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Contents*

4	Issues in data collection and analysis	61
4.1	Discourse analysis and transcription	61
4.2	Objectivity and subjectivity	63
4.3	Quantitative versus qualitative issues	65
4.4	Combined approaches to data collection and analysis	67
4.5	Dealing with teachers and learners	68
4.6	The role of learners in classroom research	72
4.7	Triangulation: the value of multiple perspectives	73
4.8	Getting baseline data	73
4.9	Summary	75
	Discussion starters	76
	Suggestions for further reading	77
	Mini-project: Analysing classroom discourse	78
Part III	The treatment of oral errors in language classrooms	82
5	Oral errors: the general picture	83
5.1	Problems in defining 'error'	84
5.2	'Errors' in first language acquisition	86
5.3	'Errors' in native language conversations	88
5.4	Developmental stages in second language learning	91
5.5	Hypothesis testing and fossilisation	93
5.6	Summary	94
	Discussion starters	95
	Suggestions for further reading	95
	Mini-project: Initiation and repair	96
6	The treatment of oral errors: what teachers do	98
6.1	Treatment versus cure	99
6.2	How teachers react to learners' oral errors	99
6.3	Deciding whether to treat oral errors	100
6.4	Deciding when to treat oral errors	103
6.5	Deciding what treatment to provide	105
6.6	Deciding who will treat oral errors	107
6.7	Error treatment and affective concerns	109
6.8	Summary	112
	Discussion starters	113
	Suggestions for further reading	114
	Mini-project: Coding errors and building models	115
	Major project: Error treatment in classrooms	116
Part IV	Input and interaction in language classrooms	119
7	Input and interaction in second language classrooms	120
7.1	Comprehensible input	120
7.2	Interaction	121

	<i>Contents</i>
7.3 Turn distribution and turn taking	124
7.4 Some quantitative studies of classroom interaction	130
7.5 Summary	134
Discussion starters	135
Suggestions for further reading	136
Mini-project: Using analytic categories	137
8 Wider perspectives on classroom interaction	139
8.1 Teacher talk	139
8.2 Learning strategies	141
8.3 Forced participation	144
8.4 Classrooms and group work	147
8.5 Summary	148
Discussion starters	150
Suggestions for further reading	151
Mini-project: Analysing interaction in transcripts	152
Major project: Recording classroom interaction	153
Part V Receptivity in language classrooms	157
9 Receptivity: the issues involved	158
9.1 Openness to what?	158
9.2 Receptivity to the teacher as a person	160
9.3 Receptivity to fellow learners	160
9.4 Receptivity to the teacher's way of teaching	161
9.5 Receptivity to course content	162
9.6 Receptivity to teaching materials	162
9.7 Receptivity to being a successful language learner	163
9.8 Receptivity to the idea of communicating with others	164
9.9 Summary	164
Discussion starters	165
Suggestions for further reading	166
Mini-project: Types of receptivity	166
Major project: Autobiography of a language learner	168
10 Receptivity: some relevant research	169
10.1 Receptivity as attention	169
10.2 Insights from language learners	171
10.3 Anxiety in language learning	172
10.4 Competitiveness in classroom language learning	176
10.5 Self-esteem in language learning	178
10.6 Parent/child/adult roles in language classrooms	180
10.7 Motivation, reinforcement and receptivity	182
10.8 Summary	183
Discussion starters	184

Cambridge University Press
0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers
Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

Suggestions for further reading	185
Mini-project: Attention	186
Major project: Diary study	190
Part VI Epilogue	194
11 Towards exploratory teaching	194
11.1 The story so far	194
11.2 Helping teachers cope with immediate classroom problems	196
11.3 The concept of ‘exploratory teaching’	197
11.4 The role of the professional researcher	198
11.5 The role of fellow teachers	199
11.6 The role of the learners	199
11.7 Making exploratory teaching a reality	200
Appendix A Interaction Analysis	202
Appendix B Foreign Language interaction analysis (<i>FLint</i>) system	204
Appendix C Foci for Observing Communications Used in Settings (FOCUS)	206
Appendix D The Embryonic Category System	213
Appendix E Summary of Sinclair and Coulthard’s system of analysis	214
Appendix F COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) category definitions	216
Appendix G Chaudron’s Features and Types of Corrective Reactions in the Model of Discourse	220
Appendix H Transcription conventions for classroom discourse	222
Bibliography	224
Index	240

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

Many people have helped with the development of this book during the years that it has been in preparation. We are especially grateful to Peter Donovan of Cambridge University Press for his valuable feedback and incredible patience; to Leo van Lier for his wide-ranging bibliographic suggestions and his insightful criticisms on the manuscript; to our series editors, Howard Altman, and the very greatly missed Peter Strevens, and a knowledgeable anonymous reader, who all reacted in helpful detail to an early version of the volume; to Steve Gaies for his thoughts about the structure of the manuscript and his work on the early chapters; to David Tsugawa for his careful artwork, given our sketchy first thoughts about figures; to Mary Davis for her infallible good humour and efficiency in the face of endless photocopying requests, express mail orders, and the transmission of lengthy transatlantic fax messages.

We are also mindful of the great contributions made over the years by our students, our colleagues, and the teachers who have come to our workshops and allowed us to visit their classes. In particular, we are grateful to those teachers and students whose lives we have observed and recorded, and in some cases used as data in this book. The work of Mike Long and Craig Chaudron has been especially influential in our thinking about its contents, even though we have not always seen eye-to-eye with them in terms of methodology or practical emphases.

Kathi Bailey's participation in this venture was supported in part by the Allen Griffin Award from the Community Foundation for Monterey County. Since Monterey is known as a multi-cultural community, the members of the Foundation were glad to support the development of an introductory book about classroom research, for language teachers working in a variety of settings.

As the project neared completion, it was used in manuscript form with students of classroom research at San Francisco State University and the Monterey Institute of International Studies. We appreciate their feedback, and the careful proof-reading of Susie Scott and Tracey Derwing.

On the home front, in California, Ted Dale word-processed, read drafts, and deleted every fifth line of our prose. In the process of the book's evolution, Mark went off to first grade, where he learned to read and to understand what books are. We are both humbled and encouraged by Mark's comment upon seeing that the final manuscript

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgements

had no colourful illustrations: 'Well, it is sort of a boring book, but maybe teachers will like it.'

Dick Allwright
Lancaster University

Kathi Bailey
Monterey Institute of International Studies

The authors and publishers would like to thank the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

Foreign Language Annals and G. Moskowitz for *The effects of training foreign language teachers in interaction analysis*, 1968: 1 (3) pp. 219–22, reprinted as Appendix A on pp. 202–3, and for *Interaction analysis: a new modern language for supervisors*, 1971: 5 p. 213, reprinted as Appendix B on pp. 204–5; Excerpt from *Classroom Oriented Research in Second Language Acquisition* by H. W. Seliger and M. H. Long. Copyright © 1983 by Newbury House Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, as Transcript 6 on pp. 109–10; *Language Learning* and C. Chaudron for *A descriptive model of discourse in the corrective treatment of learners' errors*, 1977: 27 pp. 37–9, reprinted as Appendix G on pp. 220–1; Longman Group UK Limited and L. van Lier for *Examples of qualitative and quantitative procedures in data collection and analysis*, 1988 p. 57, reprinted as Figure 2 on p. 43; Newbury House Publishers, Inc. and R. L. Allwright for *Turns, topics and tasks: patterns of participation in language learning and teaching*, 1980 pp. 180–1 of D. E. Larsen Freeman (ed.) *Discourse analysis in second language research*, reprinted as Transcript 7 on pp. 125–6; Newbury House Publishers, Inc. and K. M. Bailey for *A model of competitiveness and anxiety and the second language learner*, 1983 p. 97 of H. W. Seliger and M. H. Long (eds.) *Classroom oriented research in second language acquisition*, reprinted as Figure 9 on p. 177; Newbury House Publishers, Inc. and N. J. Nystrom for *Teacher–student interaction in bilingual classrooms: four approaches to error feedback*, 1983 pp. 171–2 of H. W. Seliger and M. H. Long (eds.) *Classroom oriented research in second language acquisition*, reprinted as Transcript 3 on p. 85; Oxford University Press for extracts from *Towards an analysis of Discourse*, 1975 pp. 25–7, by J. M. Sinclair and M. Coulthard, reprinted by permission as Appendix F on pp. 214–15; TESOL and J. F. Fanselow for Appendix C taken from 'Beyond Rashomon – conceptualizing and describing the teaching act' by J. F. Fanselow (1977), *TESOL Quarterly* vol. 11 pp. 35–9. Copyright 1977 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on pp. 206–12; TESOL and M. Fröhlich, N. Spada and P. Allen for

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgements*

Appendix F taken from 'Differences in the communicative orientation of L2 classrooms' by M. Fröhlich, N. Spada and P. Allen (1985), *TESOL Quarterly* vol. 19 pp. 53–6. Copyright 1985 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on pp. 216–19; TESOL and M. H. Long for Figure 4 taken from 'Teacher feedback on learner error: mapping conditions' by M. H. Long (1977), *On TESOL '77* p. 289. Copyright 1977 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on p. 101 and for Figure 6 taken from 'Native speaker/non-native speaker conversation in the second language classroom' by M. H. Long (1982), *On TESOL '82* p. 214. Copyright 1983 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on p. 122; TESOL and M. H. Long, L. Adams, M. McLean and F. Castaños for Appendix D taken from 'Doing things with words – a verbal interaction in lockstep and small classroom situations' by M. H. Long, L. Adams, M. McLean and F. Castanos (1976), *On TESOL '76* pp. 144–5. Copyright 1976 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on p. 213; TESOL and P. Allen, M. Fröhlich and N. Spada for Appendix F taken from 'Communicative orientation of language teaching: An observation scheme' by P. Allen, M. Fröhlich and N. Spada (1984), *On TESOL '83*. Copyright 1984 by TESOL. Reprinted by permission on pp. 216–19.

While every effort has been made it has not been possible to identify the sources of all the material used and in such cases the publishers would welcome information from copyright holders.

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

Classroom research investigates the processes of teaching and learning as they occur in language classrooms. Its findings are important to classroom teachers, researchers, and theorists. Methodologically speaking, classroom research is very diverse – ranging from relatively simple observations to tightly controlled experiments. The field has grown greatly in the past ten years across the whole spectrum of education, across levels and across disciplines, with new findings leading to new research methods, and vice versa. Classroom research is a dynamic area of investigation and one bearing fruitful results of major relevance to many facets of teaching, syllabus design, materials development, testing, and teacher education. For all these reasons, we feel there is a need for a basic text introducing language professionals to classroom research.

This book was therefore written specifically for language teachers, to document many of the recent developments in language classroom research, and to summarise them in non-technical terms. It is not a book written for experienced researchers. Rather, it is a book written by two researcher/teachers specifically for teachers who may have little or no background in research practices or statistical reasoning. The intended audience, then, includes both teachers new to the field, who may be in the midst of their pre-service training courses, and experienced teachers, who would like to be updated on relevant research findings. Since these findings pertain both to foreign language learning and to second language learning, research in both contexts will be discussed.

The book has three main aims: 1) to bring language classroom research to the attention of teachers of English to speakers of other languages, as well as to teachers of other foreign languages; 2) to explore the implications of classroom research findings and procedures for the actual practice of language teaching; and 3) to encourage and help teachers to become explorers themselves, in their own classrooms, partly for the sake of increasing the overall understanding of classroom language learning, but mostly for the sake of improving *their* learners' chances of making good progress.

The overall goal, then, is to help bridge the gap between research and teaching, and more particularly between researchers and teachers. It is understandable that teachers are suspicious of researchers, since the results of research projects rarely seem to have much direct practical

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

relevance, and the process of research – of actually having a researcher, usually a complete stranger, come into your classroom to investigate your particular teaching situation – must sometimes seem an unwelcome extra burden. And yet teachers and researchers (at least the sort of researchers this book is concerned with) are necessarily interested in the same two fundamental questions: what works in the classroom, and why? It seems likely that many professional researchers have given research a bad name precisely because they have failed to demonstrate that they really are concerned with such basic questions.

Perhaps some researchers *are* purely parasitic. We hope in this book, though, to show that language classroom research can be directly relevant to teachers, and not only the results of such research, but also the actual practice of it as well. We hope to show that teachers, whatever they think of professional researchers, might actually enjoy and profit from looking upon their classroom teaching as an excellent opportunity for conducting their own investigations – not so that they can, in their turn, become ‘parasitic researchers’, but so that they can become more effective language teachers, better able to help the learners with whom they work. Perhaps the learners themselves could also begin to investigate their own second language learning. Given their vantage points, teachers and learners may well come up with insights from which we could all benefit.

There are signs that a reconciliation between teachers and researchers is already taking place. Slowly the profession as a whole is realising that, no matter how much intellectual energy is put into the invention of new methods (or of new approaches to syllabus design, and so on), what really matters is what happens when teachers and learners get together in the classroom. We all know that some teachers seem to succeed however out-of-date or out-of-fashion their methods are, but only recently have researchers begun to treat this as a central fact about teaching and learning, instead of as an inconvenient bit of untidiness best swept under the carpet. This shift of emphasis, from concentrating on planning decisions (what method to use, what sort of syllabus to adopt, and so on) to concentrating on looking at what actually happens in the classroom, has led researchers to have much greater respect for classroom teaching. The more we look the more we find, and the more we realise how complex the teacher’s job is. And teachers, in their turn, faced at last with researchers who have at least some idea of the enormous complexity of everyday classroom life, are beginning to be more receptive to the whole research enterprise. There seems, in fact, to be a growing reconciliation between such researchers and language teachers, a growing feeling of common purpose and concern.

We hope to make a convincing case, in this book, for the unity of purpose behind classroom research and language teaching, to promote

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

this reconciliation process, and ultimately to blur altogether the damagingly sharp distinction between research and teaching from which our profession has suffered too long. Being a good classroom teacher means being alive to what goes on in the classroom, alive to the problems of sorting out what matters, moment by moment, from what does not. And that is what classroom research is all about: gaining a better understanding of what good teachers (and learners) do instinctively as a matter of course, so that ultimately all can benefit.

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Introduction

Books about language teaching, however ‘practical’ they may be, are almost always about ‘planning’ rather than about ‘doing’. They aim to help us decide what *would* be the best way to teach a class, or what *would* be the best sort of syllabus to use. The purpose of this book is different, and importantly so. This book is about what *actually happens* – not just what happens to the plans we make, but what happens anyway, independently of our designs. This focus on the classroom is important because teachers and researchers alike want to know which classroom events, planned or not, make our learners’ task easier or more difficult.

As authors, we two would be wasting our time, of course, if the connection between the planning, the teaching, and the learning were a simple and direct one; if everything we teachers planned (and only what we planned) got taught, and if everything that got taught was learned. We all know though that in human learning nothing is so simple. Teachers know this and so do researchers. We also know that ‘the best laid plans’ do not guarantee perfect results. And we all know that lessons we have not properly planned are sometimes spectacularly successful. It is worth focusing on the classroom, then, on the doing rather than the planning, just because it is surely whatever actually happens in the classroom that really matters, that makes a difference to our learners’ progress.

For a long time we thought that the teaching method was the most important thing – that all we had to do was find the ‘right’ method. But enough research has now been done for us to be quite sure that we were wrong. Method does matter, of course, but only to the extent that it makes a real difference to what actually happens in the classroom.

In the 1960s and early 1970s there were some important research projects that tried to compare the major methods of the time. The most famous of these was the Pennsylvania Project (Smith 1970), which compared the ‘audiolingual’ method and the ‘traditional’ method. The study’s inconclusive results were, in the words of the Project Director, ‘personally traumatic to the project staff’. From the outset the researchers had expected a clear superiority for audiolingualism, but instead they found no significant differences on several measures, and superiority of the traditional method on traditional measures of reading skill.

There was a great deal of discussion at that time about why the results should have been so inconclusive, and one of the main reasons seems to

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

have been precisely that there was this gap between the planning, the teaching, and the learning. It was one thing to ‘plan’ that a certain number of teachers should teach for a certain period of time, several years, following this or that method, and quite another thing to be sure that all the teaching had gone as planned, and yet another to believe that the learning would in any case directly mirror the teaching. We are a bit wiser now. Focusing more on the classroom could have helped the Pennsylvania Project by providing a clear picture of the sorts of teaching the learners actually got during the experiment.

Researchers who do focus on the classroom, who really begin to study what goes on there, find very much more happening than just the more or less messy implementation of some particular method. Looking in classrooms we see so much going on that it becomes easy to understand why the choice of a global teaching method cannot be what really makes some classrooms better places for learners to be in than others. Unfortunately, we see so much going on in the classroom we soon realise that understanding this mysterious chemistry is becoming more complicated rather than easier. Researchers and teachers alike want to know what *really* matters, what *really* helps learners, but of course there are no straightforward answers. This book, then, is *not* a book of answers to the question ‘what matters?’. It is a book of explorations, a book about what researchers have learned so far from attempts to study what happens in language classrooms. It is a book about how we, as teachers, might go about continuing the explorations in our own classrooms.

One major claim underlies the whole book: in order to help our learners learn, it is not ‘the latest method’ that we need, but rather a fuller understanding of the language classroom and what goes on there. Part I will set the scene historically and then introduce the reasoning behind our position. In Part II we will explore some of the major methodological issues which have dominated language classroom research to date.

In Parts III, IV, and V, the core of the volume, we will be looking at the findings – the sorts of things researchers have discovered since language classroom research began in the late 1960s (just as the method experiments began reporting their inconclusive results). We will look first in Part III at ‘oral errors’ and how teachers deal with them – one of the prominent topics in early classroom-centred research. Next we will consider some of the complexities of ‘classroom interaction’ (Part IV): how language learners and teachers take speaking turns and what functions classroom talk fulfils in the language learning process. Part V, on ‘receptivity’, will summarise the research on learners in terms of such personal matters as anxiety, competitiveness, motivation, and self-esteem, to see if there is evidence that these issues matter or that they make much of a difference in language learning. Finally, in Part VI, we will close with our ideas about ‘exploratory teaching’ – an attitude, a

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Introduction*

stance that teachers can take to utilise these ideas about classroom research in their own settings.

Throughout the book, after each chapter, there will be *Discussion starters*, and *Suggestions for further reading*. There are also ideas for practical activities that teacher training groups or individual teachers might like to undertake to explore each topic in more depth.

The *Discussion starters* are intended to be helpful in at least three different ways. First we hope they will encourage readers to relate the main points of the content to their personal experience, both as teachers and as learners. Second, these questions and tasks should prompt discussion that will lead to a better understanding of the points themselves, and third, such discussions should often prove useful in assisting readers to decide which of the practical activities they wish to undertake, and to clarify for themselves the issues involved.

The first aim of the practical activities (both the Mini-projects and the Major projects) is to give you, as a reader, some experience in analysing data. In some instances, these projects will provide opportunities for you to collect your own data to think about and to talk about, instead of depending solely on whatever we, as authors, have already supplied within the chapters themselves. But collecting your own data also means becoming a classroom researcher yourself, and our second aim is precisely to give you practical experience in small-scale classroom investigations so that if you wish to do such things in the future, you will not only know the thinking behind them but also have some practical understanding of what tasks are involved.

Some sorts of data collection can be done very quickly, perhaps in less than one class hour, and without any elaborate preparation. Such activities are easy to use for beginning your explorations, either in isolation or in conjunction with the *Discussion starters*. Other sorts of data collection take much longer and demand not only much more preparation but also a great deal of work on the interpretation of the data you have collected. Such activities should be given enough time and enough thought so that you can properly take into account all the methodological considerations introduced in Part II. We have aimed at providing a balance between activities that can be done by a person working alone and activities that call for teamwork. Some of the individual activities will in fact be more fruitful if several different people do them at the same time, in different settings, and this we have also indicated where appropriate.

Finally, and particularly since this is an introductory text, we have included *Suggestions for further reading* at the end of each chapter. Citations are also given throughout the text, but since this book is intended for teachers rather than experienced researchers, we have tried to make the prose less cumbersome by listing additional references in the

Cambridge University Press

0521269091 - Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research
for Language Teachers

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Introduction

Suggestions for further reading rather than only using the normal academic style of within-text referencing. These *Suggestions* provide ideas about articles and books you might read if you become intrigued by some aspects of the topics under discussion. These readings were chosen because they are 1) classic treatments of the issues, 2) clear, readable discussions, or 3) widely available in language teaching circles around the world, or ideally all three. We have not attempted an exhaustive review of *all* the pertinent studies, but we do believe the background information given in this volume will prepare teachers to read the classroom research literature with confidence and critical wisdom, and to become exploratory teachers in their own classrooms.