

David Nunan Anthology

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Section II Empirical Studies

Introduction

The chapters in this section are intended as a representative sample of the kinds of empirical studies that I have carried out over a considerable number of years. These chapters include original investigations into processes of classroom interaction, learner strategies, and the impact of English as a global language. The unifying theme for these studies is the notion of learner-centeredness, learner voices and the role of the learner within the learning process. The first group of studies is based on analyses of classroom interaction and fall under the rubric of ‘classroom-oriented’ research. The second group look at various aspects of learning styles and strategies. The section concludes with two large scale surveys into the impact and implications of English as a global language on policies and practices in schools and workplaces around the world.

I have divided the studies up in this way as an organizational convenience. In reality, they overlap to a considerable extent. The first two chapters in the section are reviews of methodological and substantive issues in language learning and development. These studies take the form of secondary research in which I carried out a meta-analysis of published research into classroom research and second language acquisition. The first study, ‘Methods in second language classroom research’ was published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* in 1991. In the study, I surveyed fifty widely cited studies into second language acquisition in instructional contexts. The study came up with several interesting conclusions, including the fact that only fifteen of the fifty studies derived their data from actual classrooms. The second chapter ‘Issues in second language acquisition research: Examining substance and procedure’ was originally published in the Handbook of Language Acquisition, edited by Ritchie and T. Bhatia.

The third chapter in the collection, ‘Communicative language teaching: making it work’ is a classroom based study that I carried out in the mid-1980s which was published in *ELT Journal*. The aim of the study, which was conducted in the full flush of the so called communicative revolution, was intended to investigate the extent to which principles of CLT were actually realized at the level of classroom action. The study found that while lip-service was paid to the notion of CLT, it did not appear to be implemented at the level of classroom action. Rather, teachers fell back onto traditional pedagogical practices and patterns of classroom interaction. Suggestions of ways to address the gap between theory and practice are made in the conclusion to the study.

This study is followed by one I published in *Cross Currents* in 1992, entitled ‘Sociocultural aspects of second language acquisition’. The aim of this study was to challenge to prevailing psycholinguistic and psychometric orientation to second language acquisition research. The inspiration of this study was an earlier study carried out by Mike Breen in the mid 1980s in which he looked at the social side of second language acquisition.

The next study, ‘Hidden voices: insiders' perspectives on classroom interaction’ appeared in the collection that I edited for Cambridge University Press with Kathi Bailey entitled *Voices from the Language Classroom*. In this study, I sought to obtain insights into the ‘hidden life’ of the classroom by looking at ways in which the processes of classroom instruction are illuminated by interpretive commentaries by teachers on what is actually happening in the moment by moment realities of the lessons that they conducted.

Following the ‘hidden voices’ study, is an investigation that looks at a very different kind of classroom, the virtual classroom. ‘A foot in the world of ideas’, published in *Language Learning & Technology*, is an interpretive account of the synchronous interactions between a group of students and their professor in an online graduate TESOL program.

The final chapter in this cluster of studies, ‘Action research and professional growth’, is different from the other studies in this first group of chapters. It looks at how research by teachers into their own classroom practices transforms those practices. In the first part of the chapter, action research is described and exemplified. Then in the final part of the chapter, data are presented from teachers who have conducted their own action research into the effects of involvement in such research changed the way they teach.

The next set of studies looks at various aspects of learning styles and learning strategies. ‘Seven hypotheses about language learning and teaching’ is the text of a plenary presentation that I gave at the Annual International TESOL Convention in Vancouver in 2000. This study was based on an extensive set of interviews that I carried out with my colleague Phil Benson at the University of Hong Kong in which we documented the language learning histories of a group of undergraduates at the University.

The two studies which follow, ‘Learner strategy training in the classroom: An action research study’ and ‘Does learner strategy training make a difference?’ are empirical investigations into the effect of learner strategy training on learner outcomes, although they are quite different in nature. The first takes the form of an action research study, while the second is a survey of learner attitudes and practices.

The final chapter in this cluster of studies is the text of a plenary presentation at the TESOL Illinois Annual Convention in Chicago in 2003. The study is based on narrative inquiry which is becoming an increasingly popular approach to research into learning processes. The use of learner narratives in research and teaching is described, and a study drawing on learner narratives is presented to illustrate the approach.

The two studies that complete this section look at the growing impact that the emergence of English as a global language is having on planning policy and practice. Both involve relatively large scale surveys. The first, which was published in *TESOL Quarterly*, investigated the impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region. The second drew on an online survey of over 20,000 learners to look at the value of online English language learning to employees of multinational companies.