Teacher Knowledge as Context

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Research has shown that teachers bring into the classroom multiple domains of knowledge, including disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., the process of relaying disciplinary knowledge to students), knowledge of how learning occurs, knowledge of students' learning styles, knowledge of curricular and contextual demands, their own personal practical knowledge (e.g., experiences in the classroom as a student; cultural norms surrounding the role of a teacher), and knowledge of how to reflect on all of these domains in order to adapt one's teaching accordingly[1]. This piece will briefly explain and demonstrate the importance in examining teacher knowledge as context within classroom discourse analysis in order to enrich the understanding of *what* is happening in classroom interaction and explain *why* it is so.

The fields of discourse analysis and teacher education have attempted to understand the manner in which classroom interaction is constructed within specific teaching contexts. In fact, Freeman and Johnson (1998) state that there is a connection between these two disciplines, as the actual activity/interaction of teaching stems from the knowledge that a teacher brings to a classroom. Unfortunately, as Lazaraton and Ishihara (2005) attest, the two fields have rarely converged to complement their findings in an attempt to further understand how teacher/student interactions within classrooms are constructed. Of the few studies that bridge these two areas of research, Carlsen (1993) found that the amount of disciplinary knowledge novice science teachers had was negatively correlated with the amount of teacher talk time. In the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching, Lazaraton (2003) saw that non-native English speaking ESL teachers would restrict the amount of student interaction via question types (e.g., closed questions) when the discourse veered towards cultural topics unfamiliar to the teachers. These studies have initiated the discussion of bridging teacher knowledge and classroom discourse research to more fully understand classroom interactions; however, the types of data gathered have only generated findings that exemplify single teacher knowledge domains being actualized in and influencing classroom discourse. This does not coincide with findings in teacher education research that demonstrate multiple knowledge domains interacting simultaneously during teaching. It is therefore necessary to investigate how the multiple teacher knowledge domains are both actualized in and influence teacher/student discourse.

The following excerpt demonstrates how incorporating an understanding of teacher knowledge domains within the context of classroom interaction enhances our understanding of the construction of this discourse. This excerpt comes from an advanced-level adult ESL integrated skills classroom, where a student teacher from a post-baccalaureate TESOL program is conducting her second class for the semester. The students have just concluded an individual letter writing activity and are about to exchange their papers to begin a peer review exercise. The student teacher, Lily[2], has just asked the class what they thought of the writing activity. One student, Miki, provides an answer.

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[1] See Burns and Richards (2009) for a complete overview of teacher knowledge.
[2] All names are pseudonyms.

How Was That?

1	Lily:	How was that?
2		{(1.2)- ((Lily smiles at Ss))}
3		.hh speechless? Speechless.
4	Miki:	ºdifficult.º
5	Lily:	<how was it. {>what?<- ((changes her body position towards Miki))}
6	Miki:	Difficult.
7	Lily:	<u>Di</u>fficult. Okay. ºIt's okay.º
8		(0.4)
9	→	Wh- {(0.2)-((looks down))} {((looks back at all Ss))-let's see how you did.}
10		So <u>let's</u> uhm:: (.) why don't you exchange (.) <u>your</u> letter with the person
11		sitting next to you.

To understand how the interaction between the teacher and student is constructed, we first turn to a line-by-line analysis. The excerpt begins in line 1 with Lily asking students for their opinions of the writing activity. A brief 1.2-second gap follows, where any student could have taken the turn and provided an answer. As this does not occur, Lily self-selects the turn in line 3 and reiterates the students' non-responses in line 3. In line 4, Miki quietly provides a one-word answer with *difficult*. Lily's sudden start in line 5 shows that she may not have been initially aware that a student did take up the turn in line 4. The quick insertion of *what* with the re-positioning of her body show Lily's sudden realization of Miki's turn. After Miki repeats her answer, Lily echoes this and provides an affective aligner in the use of *it's okay* to demonstrate her understanding that the exercise may have been difficult for the students. It is in line 9 where Lily begins to further this one-on-one interaction with a wh- question, possibly to ask "why" or "what made it difficult." Up to this point, Lily has attempted to draw out the students' perceptions of the writing activity, and has even set up an individual dialogue with one student. However, she uses a pivot to abruptly stop her wh- question, pauses very briefly, and then tells the entire class to exchange their papers with their partners. Aligning with Johnson's (1995) discourse findings that teachers usually control the direction of the classroom interaction, Lily's self-repair in line 9 has changed the course of the interaction away from Miki and her individual perception of the writing activity towards the entire ESL class and the continuation of Lily's originally planned activity. The elongation of the word *uhm* and the insertion of micro-pauses in line 10 shows some difficulty Lily has in producing this turn, possibly because of the sudden change in the discourse.

This line-by-line analysis describes the construction of this interaction based on how Lily and Miki orient to each other's turns. However, Lily's teacher knowledge domains also play a large role in how the discourse is directed. In addition to having the classroom discourse transcription, data from Lily's post-teaching observation sessions and post-teaching journal reflections provide insight into what is influencing this interaction. Although the data from these sources are not in specific reference to this excerpt, they do provide insight into Lily's general thought process and perceived reasoning behind her overall teaching. During Lily's post-observation session with her supervisor, she describes the difficulty she has with deciding what to focus on in the classroom. On one hand, she is being told via her teacher education courses that students' affective filters need to be taken into consideration as a facilitating or hindering factor in language learning (e.g., Brown, 2006). As she interprets it, this means to get the students to explicate "their concerns … and for [Lily] to show an understanding" (post-

observation session). Lily says this entails teachers taking on numerous roles, such as a psychologist. At the same time, she is aware of the curricular constraints within the program that she teaches. For instance, there is the importance of proceeding through the different units in a timely manner, meaning that students need to get through a certain number of activities within the time constraints of each class period. Essentially, Lily is concerned about how to balance her disciplinary knowledge of language learning (e.g., addressing individual students' issues) with curricular constraints (e.g., timing of activities). Having an awareness of these conflicting teacher knowledge domains provides for a richer understanding of the excerpt. Lily's knowledge of addressing students' affective filters is evident beginning in line 1 as she asks for the students' opinions of the preceding activity. In line 7, Lily acknowledges Miki's answer with the first *okay*, and then continues with *it's okay* as a way to align with Miki's perception that the activity could be difficult for some. Lily's continuation with this dialogue in line 9 also shows her desire to continue working with Miki to possibly find out why she considered the activity difficult. However, her knowledge of the curriculum in which she works takes precedence over her prior focus and affects the directional change in the discourse. Line 9 also demonstrates Lily's on-line decision-making, determining which factor takes precedence over the other, and ultimately deciding that continuing with the activity is more important than continuing with Miki's reasons for the difficulty in doing the activity.

Although not a full research study, the ideas presented here further the discussion on how classroom discourse examinations can be enriched by the incorporation of teacher knowledge as context for analysis. Unlike the foci of previous studies advocating for this joint venture, I have shown that the construction and direction of classroom discourse can be influenced by how the various teacher knowledge domains interact with each other. These interactions can also be actualized in the discourse, as was seen in the excerpt presented when Lily performed a self-repair that changed the direction of the classroom interaction. Often analysts of classroom discourse focus solely on the turn-by-turn mechanisms that construct the interaction. Although these tools are necessary for a better understanding of how teachers and students co-construct their participatory roles in the classroom, they only explain one small aspect of the much larger instructional context. Merging discourse analysis with teacher knowledge allows researchers to draw conclusions explicitly linked to the teacher's understanding of what is occurring in the classroom, and therefore provides practical implications for teacher education that could assist future educators in their drive to facilitate their students' learning in the language classroom.

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