

**Relations Between Teachers' Conceptions of In-class and  
Out-of-class Interactions and Reported Teaching Practices  
Teachers' Belief Study**

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19, May 2006



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## **Abstract**

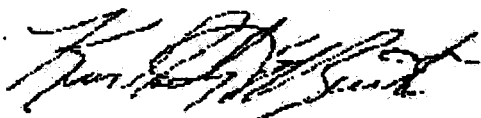
Spoken interaction with others is one of the most powerful tools in learning and teaching a second language. This investigation is concerned with uncovering and categorising the ways a group of L2 teachers' describe their experiences and beliefs of two types of spoken interaction; those that occur in the classroom (ICI) and those that occur outside the classroom (OCI). Twenty-eight EAP teachers were interviewed using phenomenographic and ethnographic investigative approaches and asked to describe their experiences and how they thought about and used spoken interactions in the teaching and learning of a situated lesson. The conceptions that emerged as consistent (reported as experienced most frequently across the group and within individual transcripts) were identified and categorised into two sets of categories of description (COD) one for each type of interaction. Across the group of teachers, five stable ICI categories of conceptions were identified and four stable OCI categories of conceptions were identified. These categories describe the range of conceptions that emerged across the group as a whole and do not attempt to rate the understandings of individual teachers.

The conceptions of interactions in both sets of categories followed a hierarchal pattern of development from less complete to more complete understandings of these interactions. These descriptions formed two frameworks that are supported by similar patterns describing less complete and more complete understandings of various concepts in sets of categories published in other education settings (Marton & Booth, 1997). Exploration into the teaching and learning approaches reported in the teachers' experiences of ICI and OCI indicated that the utilization of interactions was constrained by the ways these interactions were conceived. Relations between more developed conceptions of both phenomena emerged in situations where more developed conceptions were reported. In these situations both ICI and OCI were simultaneously present in the teachers' awareness and perceived as different aspects of the same teaching/ learning situations. Across the group the teachers reported less powerful ideas of how to utilize OCI than how to utilize ICI.

## **Declaration: Statement of Authorship**

I certify that this work is the result of my own research and that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. References to work of other authors have been properly acknowledged within the text of the thesis and cited in the bibliography. Epigraphs from well-known educators and philosophers used to illustrate some of the points on learning and teaching in the individual chapters have been cited in a special section page (xi). I certify that the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length (93,098), exclusive of bibliographies, appendices and footnotes.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: .....May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006.....

## Sources of Epigraphs

Epigraphs used in thesis are well known teaching and learning quotes that can be

Accessed on multiple links at the following sites:

Teachers Talk <http://brownvbaord.org/brwnqurt/01-2/01-2h.htm>

World of Quotes <http://www.worldofquotes.com/author/index.html>

Quotes from famous people <http://www.nonstopenglish.com>

Educational Quotes [http://www.oregonparentsunited.org/educational\\_quotes.htm](http://www.oregonparentsunited.org/educational_quotes.htm)

## **Acknowledgments**

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Special thanks also to Associate Professor Michael Prosser who agreed very kindly to work in an honorary capacity to assist with the phenomenographic analysis reported in the thesis. I also need to express gratitude to the people that helped in assisting with getting the thesis together; Teresa Kempe for her help in typing up the data; Nowick Gray for his help in editing and formatting; Yefim Levinski for his help with statistical analysis; and Kate Davis for helping with all sorts of organizing and odd jobs that were invaluable in keeping everything on track. I also owe a very special thank you to Samantha Pickering for her encouragement and interest throughout the process, her expertise in helping me to edit and check the referencing, and her selflessness in coordinating the printing and binding of my final submission.

In many ways, the greatest debt I owe is to my family who provided moral support throughout the process but in the last year especially assisted in so many ways when unexpected happenings made completion seem very difficult. And lastly my beautiful daughter Chenoa in particular was born just prior to the start of the project and has been so patient dealing with a preoccupied mother that "always has homework to do" I am finally finished and thank you for your love and understanding.

## Glossary

Term	Meaning
<i>Allocating to the highest possible level:</i>	Refers to the categorization of individual transcripts as a whole through identifying the concepts or perceptions that are most prominent within each situation explored (12).
<i>Belief or Conception:</i>	In this thesis, these terms are used simultaneously, refer to a more developed idea or an opinion that is the result of experience or a process of reflection, and are thought to be true (1).
<i>Categorical Framework:</i>	A set of descriptions that have been organized as separate conceptions that emerged across the group of individuals studied. In this thesis, the categories that emerged appeared to be related in that the ways individual experiences were described formed a pattern across the group of teachers' that moved from less complex to more complex descriptions of the ways that the phenomena were conceived and understood (144).
<i>Categories of Description:</i>	From a phenomenographic perspective, conceptions are considered as relations between individuals and a particular task and context. These conceptions are viewed as dynamic and dependent on the particular context and task in which they are being studied. At the same time, though, proponents of this view consider the number of conceptions and approaches about particular phenomena to exist in relatively small numbers, which can be identified and described (96).
<i>Communicate:</i>	Within this thesis this term refers to the transfer of meaning or concepts through speaking in the target language rather than using written texts or non-verbal communication techniques (5).
<i>Communicative competence:</i>	In the field of language teaching this term generally refers to the students' knowledge of the language and ability to use the target language effectively and appropriately (37).
<i>Competency:</i>	In this thesis this term refers to how the teachers' described experiences of perceiving learning as occurring through

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observing the language learners' successful use of the language (51).

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*Constitute:* A phenomenographic term that describes change in the way *something* is experienced that comes about through developing an awareness of different aspects and or understanding details of those aspects (59).

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*Constitutionalist perspective:* A non-dualistic perspective, which holds that the world and the individual are internally related through the individual's awareness of the world and the aspects of the world, that he or she experiences (20).

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*Event:* In this thesis a term that refers to an action described in the lessons reported by the EAP teachers. The primary event in many of the lessons described was the task or activity assigned or arranged by the teacher. During these events, instances of planned interaction and unplanned interaction were described (32).

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*Formal experiences:* In this thesis this term refers to the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers' individual experiences as a learner or teacher that occurred outside of the lesson reported but originated within a formal academic context. These formal experiences were reported as informing the individual teacher's understanding of a particular situation described in the interview (268).

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*Highest category:* In phenomenographic studies categorising or classifying perceptions in terms of the highest category means the identification of concepts for which there was substantial evidence within the transcript (128).

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*Informal experiences:* In this thesis this term EAP teachers' individual experiences as a learner or teacher that occurred outside of the lesson reported but originated within an informal context. These formal experiences were reported as informing the individual teacher's understanding of a particular situation described in the interview (268).

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<i>Instance:</i>	In this thesis specific instances of spoken interaction reported by the teacher for example when a teacher described students as ‘working together to discuss the task’ the teacher was then asked to reflect on how they experienced learning and teaching in that particular moment or instance (123).
<i>Learning:</i>	From a phenomenographic perspective, learning is described in a series of steps or as a growing awareness. Learning is perceived as internally connected to what is experienced—what is learned cannot be separated from the person’s experience of that phenomenon (ix, 1).
<i>Less complex, less complete or limited descriptions of conceptions:</i>	In this thesis, these terms were used interchangeably to identify differences in conceptions of interactions in the experiences reported. The categorization of these descriptions were organized using phenomenographic methods however they were also grounded within a large body of L2 literature and educational research outlining surface approaches to teaching and learning (90).
<i>More complex or less complex ways of experiencing:</i>	Aspects of a phenomenon often are separated and experienced separately in a sequential order. For instance, when learning numbers, children experience different aspects of the number. The number 6 might first be understood as the sound that follows the sound of the number 5, the child might then learn to recognise the symbol for that sound, then recognize the number sequentially, then understand the value of the number when counting objects and so on. Complexity refers to the fuller ways of experiencing a phenomenon that emerge when multiple aspects or parts of the whole are experienced simultaneously and described (x, 156).
<i>More complex, more complete descriptions of conceptions:</i>	In this thesis, these terms were used interchangeably to identify differences in conceptions of interactions reported by the EAP teachers. The categorizations of these descriptions were organized using phenomenographic methods however they were also grounded within a large body of L2 literature describing

	deep approaches to teaching and learning (359).
<i>Object of study:</i>	What the teacher was trying to teach in a specific situation (166).
<i>Outcome space:</i>	The compilation or grouping of the different ways, a phenomenon is experienced across a group which (as a rule) form a hierarchy (287).
<i>Out-of-class interactions:</i>	In this thesis the term specifically refers to spoken interaction in the target language with speakers of the target language occurring outside a classroom context (I, 1).
<i>Outside Experiences:</i>	In this thesis refer to experiences reported by the teachers describing the learning and teaching experiences that occurred outside the formal context of the classroom but were reported as naturally emerging either from the teacher or from the students within the spoken interactions described in a particular lesson (ix, 217).
<i>Perception:</i>	In this thesis this term refers to a single meaning or idea that may be based only on intuition, feeling, or a brief experience (I, 1).
<i>Phenomenography:</i>	A research method that is concerned with the collective aspects or manifests of phenomena those become apparent across a group of individuals and are described in pictures or words. This method is specifically useful when describing phenomena as others see them and describing the variation in ways of experiencing something within an educational context. (19).
<i>Real life data:</i>	In this thesis refers to those interactions that the teacher had firsthand knowledge of, either as a participant or as an observer, rather than interactions that they had not experienced themselves (17).
<i>Situation:</i>	A phenomenographic term that describes the wholeness of what is experienced is the situation. The situation occurs in a specific location, time and place. In this thesis, these situations occurred in a specified location, time and place, with a particular type of teacher teaching students of similar proficiency levels for

	<p>similar purposes, which has been described as a situated context by the researcher. The specific situations in the lessons reported by the teachers refer to the whole group of instances where a particular learning or teaching experience is described. These descriptions of specific teaching and learning situations didn't always happen in chronological order. As in most real life conversations, the teachers' descriptions of a lesson (or a series of tasks in one lesson) did not follow a linear process but occurred within teachers' individual narratives of the entire experience of the lesson. When describing a task that occurred in the lesson for example the EAP teachers often expressed multiple types of learning or teaching situations experienced (4).</p>
<i>Teacher cognition:</i>	<p>A term used to describe the general body of research into language teachers' thinking, beliefs, perceptions, conceptions, knowledge, transfer of knowledge, constructions, etc. (53).</p>
<i>The object experienced:</i>	<p>In this thesis is (collectively) the different ways that a group of teachers report their awareness of how they experience in-class and out-of class interactions in the teaching and learning of second language (20).</p>
<i>Variation in 'Ways' of Experiencing:</i>	<p>Phenomenographic term that describes differences in how relevant aspects of a particular phenomenon are not always simultaneously present in an individual's awareness. In one situation, one aspect may be separated from other aspects of the phenomena and more evident in an individual's awareness whereas other aspects may not be discernable (156).</p>
<i>Variation:</i>	<p>A change in an aspect or the structure that surrounds the person experiencing a phenomenon (107).</p>