

Uncovering Teacher Interactional Competency in Small-Group Activities and its Ramifications on Learning Opportunities

Dr. Drew Fagan

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3211, Art & Sociology Building



While the teacher's role in the learning process has garnered much empirical work, only a small subset of research has investigated teachers' moment-by-moment decision-making in classroom interactions and the ramifications of those decisions on learning opportunities. When addressing learner contributions to the discourse, teachers possess a set of interactional competencies enabling them to utilize verbal and nonverbal cues that simultaneously meet the needs of (a) the learners at that particular moment in time, (b) the interactional goals of the immediate discourse, and (c) the long-term learning goals beyond the immediate discourse. These competencies, however, are often left implicit, making it difficult for teachers to verbalize their reasoning. In addressing this, I examine one ESOL teacher's management practices used when choosing to self-select turns in small-group activities, i.e., when the teacher is not nominated by the learners to speak but rather chooses to "interrupt" in the interaction. Through the lens of conversation analysis, varied discursive practices used by the teacher emerge from the data, along with contextual factors influencing the teacher's choice of practice as evidenced in the discourse itself. The talk concludes with a discussion on the methodologies used to examine teacher interactional competency and the affordances of examining such competency as it affects learning opportunities.

Drew Fagan (Ed.D., Teachers College, Columbia University) is Assistant Clinical Professor Applied Linguistics and Language Education, Coordinator of TESOL Outreach Programs, and Associate Director of the Multilingual Research Center at the University of Maryland, College Park. His research focuses on factors affecting teacher talk and its subsequent effects on language learning opportunities in classroom interactions. For over two decades, he has worked as an ESOL teacher and teacher educator in P-12, higher education, and adult education settings across the United States, Japan, China, Spain, Mexico, and the Slovak Republic.

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