

Qualitative Approaches to Classroom Research with
English Language Learners

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an overview of recent qualitative research in classrooms examining English language learners (ELLs). I first present common features of qualitative research and review debates regarding research paradigms in the social sciences and humanities. I also discuss the role of triangulation and capturing participants' insider or *emic* perspectives in qualitative research and highlight various data collection methods and ways of combining macro-level and micro-level analyses, particularly in ethnographic research. Ethical issues, difficulties obtaining informed consent in classroom research, and criteria for evaluating qualitative research are then considered. Three qualitative studies that have been deemed exemplary and meritorious by scholars in English language education are then presented and some common themes in current qualitative classroom research with ELLs are identified. The chapter concludes with directions for future qualitative research.

Introduction

Over the past 2 decades, research in language education, as in other academic disciplines, has witnessed a major shift in the types and methods of research that are accepted as valid, important, and useful. Whereas quantitative studies of a psychometric nature or involving (quasi-) experimental designs might previously have been viewed as more legitimate forms of research within education and the social sciences, rigorous qualitative studies in classrooms and other learning environments are now increasingly accepted as an important way of generating new knowledge and moving disciplines in innovative directions. They are also receiving more validation and support through competitive grant funding and research awards than before.

Reasons for the shift or expansion of research orientations to include more qualitative perspectives might include the following:

1. the current availability of more methodology books, special issues of journals, and courses that provide in-depth explanations and models of exemplary qualitative research in education;
2. an acceptance of the value and power of well presented case studies, ethnographic descriptions, and discourse and content analyses of speech, writing, and interaction patterns to shed light on educational issues and to seek solutions to socio-educational problems;
3. an awareness that conducting a limited number of detailed small-scale studies, ideally longitudinally, can in some cases be just as effective and insightful as larger-scale studies of different groups' performance on standardized tests, for example;
4. a recognition that teachers' and learners' perceptions of their educational experiences can be extremely revealing and instructive;
5. a growing interest in "ecological validity," and the social, cultural, situational, embodied and enacted nature of language, knowledge, and learning (e.g., Kramsch, 2002; Leather & van Dam, 2003; van Lier, 1997);

6. an awareness that the categories and interpretations that participants from different backgrounds provide in relation to their activities or knowledge—which may differ from those of outsiders—can be just as meaningful as those that are developed by researchers;
7. a greater interest in having teachers become more integrally involved in many aspects of the research process as co-investigators, from planning stages to the interpretation of results; and
8. recognition of the practical difficulties posed by conducting experimental studies in classrooms, for ethical and practical reasons, and difficulties applying certain statistical tests to smaller sets of nonparametric or not normally distributed data.

Indeed, the number of qualitative and mixed-method studies combining qualitative and quantitative approaches has surged in recent years, a phenomenon clearly reflected in the journals and books published in language education and applied linguistics today (e.g., Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Davis & Lazaraton, 1995; Duff, 2002b; Lazaraton, 2000, 2003). Naturally, quantitative research still plays an important role in generating knowledge connected with teaching and learning and is preferred by many funding agencies and stakeholders, such as ministries or departments of education as well as by parents.

This chapter provides an overview of current qualitative research in classrooms examining English language learners (ELLs). The purpose of the chapter is threefold: first, to provide an overview of qualitative research as method; second, to present some studies that have been deemed exemplary and meritorious by scholars in English language education; and third, to identify some common themes addressed in current qualitative classroom research with ELLs.

Qualitative Classroom Research: Foundations and Issues

In this section, I consider briefly the following issues: some properties of qualitative research; paradigm debates in research methodology; the role of triangulation, participants' insider or *emic* perspectives, and various data collection methods used in qualitative research; combining macro-level and micro-level analyses, particularly in ethnographic research; ethical issues and informed consent; and criteria for evaluating qualitative research.

What is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research is not a unitary construct but a cluster or continuum of approaches that generally seek contextualized, naturalistic, holistic understandings and interpretations of phenomena that occur in particular types of contexts (Duff, 2002b). A growing number of qualitative methodology textbooks in education and the social sciences serve as helpful reference manuals (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Creswell, 1994, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Holliday, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Almost no textbooks in language education and

applied linguistics, in comparison, are devoted to a far-reaching discussion of qualitative research methods exclusively.

In classrooms, the typical focus is instructional behaviors, interaction patterns among teachers and students such as Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) routines, and the teaching/learning processes and outcomes associated with different types of language and literacy activities (e.g., Duff, 2002c; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Wells, 1993). Generally, qualitative research also includes the triangulation of perspectives of insiders, such as students and teachers, and those of outsiders, such as university researchers. However, the methods used also depend on the type of qualitative research being conducted, the accepted conventions associated with that approach, and the research questions being addressed. As Lazaraton (2003) and Chapelle and Duff (2003) report, conversation analysis is based on a very different set of assumptions than those in ethnography about how to interpret observed behavior and how much contextual information is relevant or important within an analysis. For ethnography, participants' explicit reflections on their own practices, values, and utterances are sought; on the other hand, speakers' perspectives and social-contextual features of discourse are only inferred in most conversation-analytic research from transcribed face-to-face and telephonic oral interactions.

The Research Paradigm Debates

Despite the gradual acceptance of qualitative research noted in the introduction, it is still often contrasted and compared with quantitative research and characterized as a less robust or less mature form of scholarly inquiry (Duff & Early, 1996). Part of the blame for such misconceptions originates with studies that do not reflect a theoretically grounded, systematic, methodical, in-depth, or original analysis or appear to simply contain a few anecdotes or vignettes. Blame also stems from old biases from the biological and physical sciences regarding the goals of research and the procedures that constitute "the scientific method." While space does not permit a review of the quantitative/qualitative research "paradigm debates" here, they continue to influence descriptions and evaluations of qualitative research and of theory building in our field (Creswell, 1994; Duff, 2002a; Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996; Palys, 1997). For example, in Eisner and Peshkin's (1990) edited volume entitled *Qualitative Inquiry in Education: The Continuing Debate*, authors address recurring themes in debates about the strengths, weaknesses, and validity of different approaches to research and problems with imposing quantitative constructs on qualitative studies or asserting that quantitative research is necessarily objective, generalizable, reliable, and so on.

Triangulation: Incorporating Multiple Perspectives, Methods, and Data Sources

Whereas observational classroom research with ELLs in the process-product tradition often involves quantification and real-time coding of interaction among teachers and students (Spada & Lyster, 1997), scholars now emphasize the value of understanding interaction from participants' perspectives as well (e.g., Allwright, 1997; Bailey & Nunan, 1996; van Lier, 1997). The need to ask students about their behaviors and beliefs may be particularly important in situations where

they are outwardly silent (e.g., Morita, 2002; Pon, Goldstein, & Schechter, 2003). There is less emphasis on the triangulation of methods, perspectives, theories, sites, and interpretations in quantitative research. Moreover, unlike quantitative research, which often sets out to establish causal relationships or strengths of relationships among variables of a more general nature, qualitative classroom research may be more exploratory and interpretive, and designed to examine the complex relationships among factors in a learning situation.

In classroom research on the experiences of ELLs, for example, the following elements might be involved: observations and narrative accounts of what students are doing during a particular type of focal activity and what behaviors, knowledge, and written products result from that activity; and observations of what teachers are doing during the same focal activity or in the instructional phases leading up to or following it. These observations ideally are videotaped or audiotaped, so that researchers can easily review the activities and transcribe and analyze portions of the discourse in activities of greatest interest. In some cases, however, a discourse analysis of transcripts may be of less interest than a general understanding of the activity setting, interviews with participants about the activities, and then possibly a discussion of how students' participation in the activities relates to their progress in English or in a particular subject area. Careful field notes and a synthesis of multiple data sources pertaining to a situation may be sufficient.

Combining Macro- and Micro-Analyses

Some classroom research incorporates both macro- and micro-levels of analysis in studies of classroom discourse (Duff, 1995, 2002b; Watson-Gegeo, 1988, 1997). Obtaining a macroscopic perspective requires studying the social, cultural, and historical contexts for communicative events and uncovering attitudes and behavioral patterns within schools and local communities. This approach is often found within ethnographies of communication (Saville-Troike, 1989). Studies combined with interactional sociolinguistics or critical theory (e.g., Fairclough, 1989) may address issues connected with ideologies of school reform, individualism, bilingualism, multiculturalism, racism and power relations (e.g., Freeman, 1996; Willett, 1995; Willett, Solsken, & Wilson-Keenan, 1999). Drawing on poststructuralism, they may also explore the multiple, and sometimes contested identities, perspectives, values, and practices of individuals and groups; the discourses and tensions associated with observed practices; and the sociohistorical factors that gave rise to them (Canagarajah, 1993; Goldstein, 1997; Katz, 2000; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000).

Macro-ethnographic studies of school settings are often far-ranging works that may or may not include discourse analysis or excerpts of recorded discourse, but examine the discourse contexts and ideological worlds in which members of a culture or group operate, often over a substantial period of time (e.g., Gibson, 1988; Harklau, 1994; Heath, 1983). Book-length reports of large-scale studies often combine macro- and micro-analyses, noting the larger socio-educational and sociopolitical contexts and issues surrounding language education and use and academic achievement. They may also analyze how the macro is constituted in or by micro exchanges and how points of tension between native and imported (or

local vs. newcomer) orientations to schooling are manifested. For example, my ethnographic classroom research in Hungary (Duff, 1993, 1995, 1996) revealed how a combination of macro- and micro-level analyses of communication within classrooms—and within schools and society—helped capture the evolution of discourse practices there and the tensions sometimes accompanying such changes at both the macro/societal and micro/classroom discourse levels.

However, bringing together macro and micro analyses and etic and emic perspectives can be very challenging logistically, in terms of data collection, analysis, and concise reporting. As in all empirical research, data reduction is necessary, often achieved by the principled selection of a limited number of representative activities, discourse samples, and focal research participants from a much larger study, sometimes in combination with a quantification of general patterns across the dataset and more macroscopic contextualization. One strategy is to track focal activities, participants, and types of discourse across time and settings (Green & Dixon, 1993a, 1993b). For example, McKay and Wong (1996) and Willett (1995) focused on the sociolinguistic practices, experiences, and identities (or discourses) of three to four immigrant students. Another strategy is to present data from a small number of lessons or activities from a much more extensive corpus, to address specific theoretical issues (e.g., Gutierrez, 1994; Wortham, 1992). Some studies focus on just the first days of exposure to and participation in new activities—that is, the critical, initial induction of students into new practices, situated within a larger ethnographic study (Brilliant-Mills, 1994).

Examples of activities examined in L2 research using a combination of ethnography and discourse analysis include: oral academic presentations in graduate school seminars (Kobayashi, 2003; Morita, 2000); class discussions (e.g., Hall, 1998; Losey, 1995; Morita, 2002); and literacy activities in various academic fields (e.g., Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999).

Ethical Issues

Permission to conduct observations in classroom research (whether recorded or not) and to interview participants and examine other kinds of oral/written performance is normally required, according to widely accepted ethical guidelines. However, these permissions may be difficult to obtain from all parties because of the perceived invasiveness of such practices or reluctance to draw attention to one's abilities and actions. Furthermore, those individuals (or their parents/guardians) most reluctant to provide their permissions are sometimes the ones of greatest interest and concern to researchers; for example, immigrant or international students who are struggling with limited L2 proficiency (Duff, 2002b). It is actually becoming increasingly difficult to negotiate and obtain permissions for some types of classroom research from university ethical review boards and from educational institutions; this difficulty is especially apparent when audio- and video-recorded observations are proposed for the purpose of discourse or interaction analysis but not all parents, teachers, and students agree to participate or be recorded. Action research projects may also face ethical hurdles as university human subjects research boards, such as the one at my own university, consider it to be coercive to seek informed consent from one's own students.

Criteria and Guidelines for Qualitative Research

Recently, because of the recognition that not all research can realistically be evaluated using the same criteria, there has been greater clarification about appropriate criteria for assessing both quantitative and qualitative research in TESOL—including classroom research (Edge & Richards, 1998). Examples of recent guidelines for some common types of qualitative research—(critical) ethnography, case study, and conversation analysis specifically—can be found in the *TESOL Quarterly* (Chapelle & Duff, 2003) and in Lazaraton (2003). Importantly, the guidelines underscore the need to situate research within a theoretical context, to select an issue of wider relevance and significance to the field, plus the need to collect and analyze data appropriate to the research questions being asked. Finally, sufficient evidence (e.g., data) must be provided for the interpretations and conclusions that are drawn and counter-examples, if any, should be explained. Furthermore, an explicit account by researchers (often referred to as reflexivity and subjectivity) about their own role or history in a project and unanticipated influences over the findings are expected in many types of ethnographic research nowadays. The intent is not for researchers to apologize for “contaminating” research sites by their presence but to recognize that researchers are themselves participants or instruments as well as learners in projects who should not pretend to be dispassionate, arms-length, impersonal, and invisible research agents.

In the following section, I review three exemplars of qualitative classroom research in some detail. Each reports on one piece of a larger program of research conducted by the authors, in which issues of the integration and academic performance and social well-being of immigrant language learners in North American are addressed.

Examples of Qualitative Classroom Research in Applied Linguistics

Three qualitative classroom-based studies awarded the annual TESOL Distinguished Research Award over the past decade¹ illustrate some of the principles and procedures of rigorous qualitative research and at the same time deal with important topics and potentially vulnerable populations of learners. Two of the studies took place in the United States (Harklau, 1994; Leki, 1995) and one took place in Canada (Toohey, 2001). All three involved ELLs and addressed issues connected with students' variable forms of language and literacy socialization in classrooms and the general outcomes of their schooling in terms of their academic success, language/literacy development, and sense of well-being within the educational system.

ESL vs. Mainstream Learning Environments

First among them chronologically, Harklau (1994) is one of the best known studies to examine differences in learning environments for secondary-level immigrant students in ESL classes versus mainstream courses in North America. In her longitudinal ethnographic study initially situated in a northern California high

school, Harklau tracked four newcomer students of ethnic Chinese backgrounds (three from Taiwan and one from Hong Kong) in their transition from ESL classes to mainstream courses over a period of from 4 to 7 semesters. Later, she also examined their school-to-college transitions and contradictory ways in which the students were represented in high school and college (Harklau, 1999, 2000). Harklau (1994) observed that, unfortunately, teachers in mainstream courses tended not to modify their speech for the sake of ELLs to render it more comprehensible, either through verbal adjustments to the rate and complexity of speech or through non-verbal support such as the provision of graphic organizers. Rather, rapid speech, the use of puns, humor, sarcasm, and asides were common in teacher talk, elements that posed many difficulties for learners; similar observations have been made in studies in other countries as well (see Mohan, Leung, & Davison, 2001, for summaries of other, mostly qualitative, research on optimal conditions for the mainstreaming of ELLs). In addition, with a pervasive interaction format of IRE between teachers and students in large mainstream classes, Harklau observed that students were unlikely to have more than 1 turn in 30 (if any), and generally were required to produce only short responses. Opportunities to negotiate turn-taking, nominate and develop topics, produce extended discourse, and manipulate linguistic forms related to tense, nominal reference, cohesion, and complex syntax were therefore limited.

These findings were especially noticeable in *low-track* mainstream classes—those in which recently mainstreamed ELLs were likely to be placed, which were academically less demanding and also interactionally less varied than *high-track* classes. In 12 days of classes, Harklau observed very few instances (just eight) of ESL learners talking in mainstream class discussions. In ESL classes, on the other hand, which had fewer students in them, students had more opportunities to interact: with teachers calling on them more frequently; using different seating arrangements and more open-ended questions; a dynamic, spiraling curriculum; and different, often more creative and authentic literacy tasks involving different genres. Harklau's (1994) findings mirror those subsequently reported in completely different geographical contexts in Australia and Canada but with similar populations of ethnic Chinese immigrant students (Duff, 2001, 2002c; Miller, 2000).

In summary, Harklau's (1994) article provides a very complete, well situated and synthesized account of the focal students, classes, and school over a 3.5-year period. Notably missing from the article is the presentation of transcribed classroom discourse involving teachers and students or any writing produced by the students. Rather, the primary data included, other than the rich observational data, were interviews. Each focal student was interviewed regularly and a number of other Chinese immigrants at the school were also interviewed and observed in the final year of the study to ensure that the case studies were representative of this larger population. In total, Harklau reported collecting 315 hours of observations (roughly half of them spread across 56 mainstream classes ranging from the sciences to humanities, and half in ESL classes) and 38 formal interviews in addition to many informal ones. Her article includes 21 short excerpts from interview data taken primarily from students to support her observations, which are organized around the themes of spoken language use in the (mainstream) classroom, spoken language use in the ESL classroom, written language use in the mainstream, written language use in the ESL classroom, structure and goals of instruction, explicit language instruction, and socializing functions of schooling.

Second-language Writing across the University Curriculum and Campus

The second study, by Leki (1995), examines a different population of learners and somewhat different issues as well. The focus is the challenges faced by three graduate and two undergraduate international (visa) students from Europe and Asia in their first semester at an American university. Of interest was the English writing requirements in their disciplinary courses across the curriculum and their coping strategies as newcomers to the local academic culture. That is, unlike most articles on English L2 writing, the study was not situated in writing courses and was not simply an analysis of the writing they did. It looked at the students' approaches to completing their writing assignments based on interview narratives of their academic discourse socialization. Data included weekly interviews with students, document analysis (e.g., students' writing), students' journals about their academic experiences, and interviews with some of the students' professors. Leki presented a profile of each of the five students in terms of their backgrounds and the writing requirements that stymied them in certain courses. For example, she described one student, Ling, who had to write an essay for a course in Behavioral Geography, that would

place a hypothetical group of people into fictional neighborhoods by determining in broad terms their socioeconomic class through an examination of certain personal characteristics, whether, for example, they drink Budweiser or Heineken, read *GQ magazine* or *Track and Field*, drive a Dodge or a Saab. (p. 241)

Noting how difficult this task would be for a newcomer from Taiwan, because of their lack of cultural background knowledge, Leki went on to describe how Ling overcame her difficulties by appealing to classmates or professors for help, incorporating more information about Taiwan or China in her essays, or comparing Chinese and American cultures. In some cases, Ling resisted the professor's request that she not incorporate Chinese content into each assignment. In fact, she was not the only focal student to use a strategy of resistance to a professor's demands or requirements, as Leki later explains. A case in point was a student who made up her observations for a field assignment in Speech Pathology (for which students were supposed to pretend to be a stutterer on campus for 4 hours) because of her potential embarrassment of being perceived both as a non-native English speaker and a stutterer by strangers. In another case, a student named Yang described the dilemmas he had writing critical reviews of articles on international relations: he felt that he did not yet have the expertise to presume to make authoritative, critical comments about articles. Yang also related how he had been socialized into one American professor's academic expectations when in China, only to encounter quite contradictory expectations when he went on to study in Zimbabwe, prior to coming to America. In Zimbabwe, for example, he had been expected to rely more heavily on the authority of the original authors and not to inject his own ideas, and was graded accordingly.

In her section on strategies, in which Leki (1995) discussed themes that had emerged from her inductive analysis of the data, she noted the ten different strategies that students employed, such as "Looking for Models" of good writing assignments or essays of the genre/rhetorical structures required that would help students complete their own assignments effectively. Unfortunately, none of the

courses the students took provided models for students, so the students relying on this strategy had to try to find suitable models themselves. Another strategy was “Using Current or Past ESL Writing Training,” which, with only one exception, no students mentioned as helping them with their current writing needs.

In summary, the data presented in Leki’s (1995) article include well-rounded student profiles, followed by a description and discussion of general themes (strategies) that surfaced across the five students’ experiences as well as differences across the five cases. Nine short quotations or excerpts from the students’ interviews, journals, or assignments were included from the corpus of transcribed data. She concludes the article by reviewing some of the strategies that did or did not serve students particularly well and also by considering things that the professors seemed totally unaware of. These included types of student resistance—and reasons underlying the resistance—as well as the apparent success of the strategy; students’ lack of necessary cultural schemata; and the ineffectiveness of group work that Leki (2001) later documents more fully; and lack of explicit links between their ESL course strategies and those used in their other courses. She also suggests how university-level ESL instructors might better prepare students for the intellectually and rhetorically complex tasks that await them in mainstream courses.

Marginalization and Conflict in Classes with Young Children

The third study (Toohey, 2001), examined the intersection of language and power in “peer disputes” among children in Western Canadian classrooms. From Toohey’s larger longitudinal ethnographic study of six children’s language, literacy, and identity socialization between kindergarten and Grade 2 (Toohey, 2000), she selected two focal students for this article. Data were collected through weekly classroom observations and field notes, with observations also recorded on videotape one morning a month for the 3-year period. Interviews were conducted with parents and teachers as well and home visits were also arranged by bilingual research assistants.

Toohey analyzes the videotaped data that had been transcribed and coded, from a corpus based on 80 hours of video, using a qualitative software program. The unit of analysis was disputes that occurred privately among the children—that is, without knowledge or intervention by their teachers—and the implications or consequences of children’s variable participation in these private peer disputes for their subsequent language learning and self-esteem. Toohey contrasted the linguistic backgrounds and current experiences of two Canadian-born children from her larger sample of focal students: Julie, a Polish girl, who despite having had limited proficiency in English upon entering kindergarten, had made rapid and effective progress in English and was considered an “average student” by her teacher; and Surjeet, a Punjabi girl who, despite living in a bilingual Punjabi- and English-speaking home and becoming English-dominant by age 5, “by the end of Grade 2 had acquired a school identity as an ESL learner with learning disabilities” (p. 264).

Using Corsaro and Rizzo’s (1990) classification of different types of disputes (e.g., concerning children’s possession and use of materials, engagement in play activities, opinion-giving), Toohey presents seven excerpts of classroom interaction among children that contrast the girls’ different responses to three types of dispute incidents: for example, whereas Julie resists attempts to deprive her from

using the computer (e.g., through strategic use of her allies and the compliance by others), Surjeet was much less successful negotiating disputes, usually deferring to the demands or hostility of domineering classmates and being undervalued by them as a result. Toohey argues that the ways the two children differentially negotiated disputes either enabled them to gain personal validation and opportunities to practice and improve their English (Julie) or, conversely, to be shut down by students and be positioned repeatedly as subordinate and incompetent and excluded from further opportunities to use English. The different outcomes were not only attributed to the children's personalities: also relevant, in Toohey's assessment, were their prior socialization into schooling practices (e.g., through Polish-medium Sunday School and English preschool activities, in Julie's case, with no equivalent formal preschool experience in Surjeet's case), the larger sociohistorical context of racism against visible minorities in the region as well as in the school, and then the everyday interactions such as those reported in disputes that reproduced existing inequalities. Toohey concludes that, rather than simply impose "zero tolerance" policies toward racism in schools, schools should model effective conflict resolution strategies that children might emulate, address situations of potentially dangerous domination and subordination among students, and recognize areas of children's special expertise that might validate and position them more powerfully.

Discussion

The preceding studies, all conducted by well regarded language education researchers with established programs of research exploring related issues, provide a kind of "raw data" for an inductive exploration of qualitative classroom research in our field. The commonalities among the studies, beyond their having been published in the same journal, are that they each employed ethnographic methods and conducted case studies of focal ELLs in mainstream North American classroom contexts. All three studies involved sustained observation of classes by the researchers, interviews with participants (teachers, students, and parents in some cases), and a concern about the well-being of newcomers in their new English-mediated learning communities. All three also addressed issues and course contexts not previously examined adequately: ESL-to-mainstream transitions, the role of disputes in learning/socialization, and students' perceptions of, and successes dealing with, writing demands across university disciplines. Two of the studies (by Toohey, 2001, and Harklau, 1994) took place over at least a 3-year period and two of them (Harklau and Leki, 1995) included excerpts from students' interviews or journals as their only primary, quoted, source data. Only one of the studies (Toohey's) also included an analysis of excerpted classroom discourse, although in her case it was not sanctioned or public discourse, which most classroom research investigates, but rather private interactions among children. Finally, all three make some recommendations as to how ELLs might better be accommodated and supported in their early years of classroom language/literacy socialization, with some critical discussion of the practices that least support that goal. Furthermore, they all point out ways in which teachers may be oblivious to the needs, resistance, or concerns of their minority students.

Most qualitative studies end with cautionary notes and disclaimers about their limited sample size and thus problems of generalizability (Duff, 2002a). None

of these three did so but Harklau (1994) verified the representativeness of her sample of focal students by later surveying a much larger sample of students from similar backgrounds. Rather than attempt to generalize to the larger population of all ELLs, the point of studies such as those reviewed here is to understand deeply, through a thorough, systematic, iterative analysis, a small number of participants and events considered sufficiently representative or emblematic of the larger phenomenon to be discussed. Then, instead of choosing research participants who all share exactly the same attributes and experiences, contrastive cases are sometimes selected so as to highlight variable experiences and outcomes; this sampling, selection, and reporting strategy was evident in Leki's (1995) and Toohey's (2001) case studies.

By presenting three "case studies" of qualitative classroom research with ELLs, I similarly need to provide a disclaimer to readers about the generalizability of my observations: Although these studies may be very good—indeed, award-winning—examples of qualitative research published in recent years, they do not represent the methods or issues addressed in *all* such studies, or with the many different types of learners and instructional contexts featured in the *TESOL Quarterly*, or other peer-reviewed journals. To do so would require collecting a corpus of all such studies and then doing a careful inductive analysis of the similarities and differences (or key patterns and elements) among them. Missing from these three studies, for example, was any quantification of coded data or the use of mixed methods and data matrices (e.g., Miles & Huberman, 1994); or scores showing the relationship between students' behaviors and their assessed performance at the end of the year, although Leki does report on students' grades on certain written assignments. Also absent were in-depth micro-level analyses of particular language structures, such as verb types, registers, or discourse markers, the sort of analysis that is typically undertaken in Systemic Functional Linguistic studies of classroom interaction or in certain kinds of interactional sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, and in other functional linguistic analyses (e.g., Zuengler & Mori, 2002). Nevertheless, all three articles provided persuasive and clear analyses of the language/literacy practices that may unwittingly contribute to the marginalization and disadvantage of certain types of learners, findings that might be applicable or transferable to teachers in many other settings as well.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the underpinnings of qualitative classroom research, to provide examples of recent classroom-based studies, and to reflect on other concerns, such as ethical issues and practical constraints in undertaking such studies. Space did not permit a fuller discussion of the entire range of topics that have been investigated qualitatively in recent years, not even within the same general research domain of language socialization (but for other examples, see Bayley & Schecter, 2003, and Davis & Lazaraton, 1995). Learners' complex identity issues also surfaced in the three reviewed articles, and many other qualitative studies dealing with that theme have been published by others (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Norton, 1997). What is clear is that sound qualitative research has achieved an important status in the field and has contributed, in my view, to fuller, more textured, humanized, and grounded accounts of the experiences of teachers

and learners in contemporary classrooms that are easily accessible to a wide and diverse readership. Less published qualitative research has featured the issues in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, and particularly in developing regions of the world where issues of class size, multilingualism, gender (e.g., favoring the education of boys), and access to basic teaching and learning resources and to basic teacher education may be serious problems for schools and communities (e.g., see studies in Bailey & Nunan, 1996 that focus on EFL in Hong Kong, Hungary, Pakistan, Peru, and South Africa). Some of these issues are, fortunately, now being studied to a greater extent and offer promising new directions for future research internationally. The issues are also now being studied with the use of innovative qualitative methods adopted from the humanities, involving narrativity, performativity, and multimedia including multiple types of text and data representation, contained on websites or CD-ROMS, and not just traditional forms of representation derived from the social sciences that have been the primary focus of this chapter.

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Footnote

¹The award is given annually by the Research Interest Section of TESOL to an empirical article published in the *TESOL Quarterly* the previous calendar year (some years submissions from other journals are also considered) that are deemed to be meritorious by a research adjudication committee.