

Editorial to the Special Issue ‘Conversation Analytic Studies on Teaching and Learning Practices: International Perspectives’

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The classic CA question to apply to spoken interaction is ‘why that, right now?’. This aims to reveal the rationale for the production of a specific social action at a specific point in an interactional sequence. The question can be applied in different contexts, however, so what if we apply it to this special issue – why a special issue on this topic at this time? CA emerged from the discipline of sociology in the USA in the 1960s and since then has been applied to a wide range of professional settings in a variety of countries. Education as a discipline is well-known for dependence on context; procedures which work well in one setting may not work at all in a different setting. A significant contribution of CA in the field of education has been to provide evidence of what actually happens in classrooms around the world, illuminating the actual processes and practices of teaching and learning. This collection shows how widely CA approaches are being used to investigate teaching and learning through interaction in a huge range of contexts around the world. This is clearly an approach which has come of age for educational researchers and this special issue therefore marks a milestone!

As a research methodology and an approach to social interaction, conversation analysis has been used to investigate the ways “educational practices are accomplished by participants as situated activities” (Koole 2012: 1). Although such an endeavor has been quite influential in social sciences and humanities in general and in educational sciences in particular in the last few years, it was considered radical during its early years as a new approach. This does not mean that Conversation Analysis (CA) is a mainstream methodology in educational sciences today. Despite its robust empirical methods and analytical tools, the adoption of CA methodology in educational studies has been neither universal nor evenly distributed, as some countries and regions have shown greater uptake than others. Geographical and contextual diversity is, however, a very important and desirable goal for CA studies of education. First of all, situated teaching and learning practices reflect contextual realities, which we need in order to understand how educational practices manifest themselves in talk-in-interaction in different parts of the world. Second, taking the position that we can investigate teaching and learning practices in and through interaction, the growing body of micro-analytic findings evidenced through CA can inform current and future practice at international level.

This special issue, then, aims to reflect international perspectives on teaching and learning practices by presenting conversation analytic research findings in settings from around the world where learning is mediated. The data presented in the collection of papers come from Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, Denmark, USA, Finland, Australia, Spain, Sweden, France, UK, Netherlands, Switzerland, with researchers based in Sweden, Japan, Denmark, USA, Spain, Thailand, Finland, France, Germany, Australia, UK, Switzerland, Russia, and the Netherlands. The issue also includes multimodal data in English, Swedish, Finnish, and Spanish; therefore,

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representing a broad geographical variety and diverse languages. The issue also features articles from a variety of age groups, analytic foci, and teaching and learning subjects (e.g. language, music, medicine, etc.).

The issue is set to make important contributions to L2 classroom discourse research by covering 18 papers with data collected from foreign/second language classrooms teaching languages such as English (Huq; Hauser; aus der Wieschen; Choe; Boblett; Jacknick & Creider; King; Dooly & Davitova), Italian (Filipi), Spanish (Rodriguez & Wilstermann), Finnish (Merke), and Swedish (Savijarvi). The issue hosts articles also on instructional settings such as mathematics classrooms (Gosen), one-to-one music lessons (Duffy & Healey), undergraduate supervision meetings (West), therapist and client (i.e. with aphasia) interactions (Merlino), training of medical teams (Tisserand), and language teacher training (Hale, Nanni & Hooper). Therefore, the authors add to the fields of language education, mathematics education, special education, teacher training, medical education, music education, researcher training, and digital education.

We also hope to contribute to the field of educational studies in terms of the diverse age groups of the participants represented in the issue. The age group of participants range from very young (i.e. in kindergartens, Savijarvi) and young learners (aus der Wieschen; Gosen), middle (Huq; Dooly) and high (Filipi) school level students to university level and/or adult participants (Hauser, Choe, Boblett, Jacknick & Creider, King, Hale, Nanni & Hooper; Merke; Rodriguez & Wilstermann; West; Tisserand; Duffy & Healey; Merlino). As for the topics of the articles, we present a selection of articles focusing on diverse interactional practices related to teaching and learning all around the world. Specific attention seems to be paid to epistemics and accountability for knowing and having learned (Hauser; aus der Wieschen, Merke; Gosen; Filipi), co-operation of social actions for integrating digital tools to teaching and learning practices (Dooly & Davitova; Gosen), multimodality and embodiment for accomplishment of learning and teaching (Tisserand, Merlino, Duffy & Healey, Choe, Filipi, Jacknick & Creider, Huq), and teacher and teaching talk (Hale, Nanni & Hooper; Duffy & Healey, Tisserand, King, Boblett, Choe).

This brief overview of the papers in this special issue has revealed their diversity and range in terms of topic, country, context, classroom dynamics, subjects taught and age and level of students. The question then arises as to how the diverse, heterogeneous findings of these and other CA studies in education can be synthesized and made available to the world of education. The world of education is open to research findings, but in order to have an audience and an impact, CA researchers will need to present their findings in a way which is of relevance to teachers, curriculum and materials writers, testers and policy makers, and in a format which enables application. Returning to the question ‘why that, right now?’, the time would seem to be ripe for a meta-study of CA in education which asks: what do we know, and of what use is it to the world of education? As mentioned earlier, CA is an approach which has come of age for educational researchers, but the next step must be to link the research to educational practice. Another possible area for future development would be mixed methods studies. As this collection shows, CA is excellent at illuminating the processes of learning and teaching, but much of the world of education tends to be focused on product in terms of test results. How can future studies combine a focus on process and product as well as a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches?

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