

Instructional Decision-Making as a Framework to Connect Theory and Practice in Language Teaching: The Case of Focus on Form

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This paper explores the framework of Instructional Decision-Making (IDM) as a means to connect theories in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) with practice in language teaching and learning. For this purpose, the author examines the pre-active, interactive, and post-active stages of IDM and how Focus on Form (FonF) can be applied within the classroom. This review reinforces the necessity of making theories in SLA more applicable for language teachers, highlights the potential of IDM to attain this connection, and shows the benefits and limitations of FonF as a pedagogical proposal for language teachers. The paper concludes by presenting implications for research and practice.

Key words: Instructional decision-making, focus on form, language teaching, second language learning, foreign language teaching

Este artículo explora el modelo denominado “Instructional Decision-Making” (IDM) (Toma de Decisiones del Docente) como un medio para conectar la teoría existente en el área de adquisición de segundas lenguas (SLA) y la práctica en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de un idioma. Para este propósito, el autor examina los tres momentos en el modelo de IDM, el preactivo, el interactivo y el postactivo, y presenta la teoría de Focus on Form (FonF) (Enfoque en la Forma) como un ejemplo de cómo las teorías en SLA pueden ser aplicadas en el salón de clase a través de este modelo. Este artículo de revisión bibliográfica enfatiza en la necesidad de hacer de las teorías en SLA algo más aplicable para I@s docentes de lenguas, resalta el potencial del modelo de IDM para lograr esta conexión y muestra los beneficios y las limitaciones del enfoque de FonF como una propuesta pedagógica para los docentes de lenguas. El artículo concluye presentando algunas implicaciones a nivel investigativo y práctico.

Palabras clave: Toma de decisiones del docente, enfoque en la forma, enseñanza de lenguas, adquisición de segundas lenguas, enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras

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INTRODUCTION

Connecting pedagogy in general education, language pedagogy, and theories in second language acquisition (SLA) seems to be a laborious task that has not been accomplished by teachers and researchers within the field of applied linguistics. For instance, although instructional decision-making (IDM) has been researched in general education during the last four decades as a way to understand and improve teacher performance, teacher education and students' learning (e.g. Kagan, 1992; Pajares, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), research trends in applied linguistics continue to be disconnected from the classroom and are usually presented as theoretical, abstract, and linguistic analyses that relate very little to the educational concerns of students and teachers (Crookes, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Markee, 1997). Most of these theories in SLA usually originate in classrooms labs where the complexity of language learning is reduced to the isolation of variables within the boundaries of theoretical constructs, making their applicability a remote possibility within the real world. A connection between conceptual ideas and practice seems to be necessary in order to improve language teaching and learning (Ellis, 1997).

In this context, attempts to connect some of the most current assumptions in SLA with the classroom reality are rendered highly relevant. Researchers are urged to inquire into the actual applicability of language approaches or theoretical trends such as Universal Grammar; Input Hypothesis; Interaction Hypothesis; Output Hypothesis; Error Correction; Interlanguage; Teachability Hierarchy; and Focus on Form (FonF), among others. Researchers need to determine whether their findings or analyses really reflect what occurs in the interaction between teachers and language learners, and guarantee that their conclusions reflect the world intended to be explored and improved, if a final improvement of practice is pursued in the area of applied linguistics.

From this perspective, this review will be a first attempt to understand how theory in SLA may contribute to enhance pedagogical knowledge and improve teacher practice. It examines the pre-active, interactive, and post-active stages of IDM and presents FonF as an example of how theories in SLA can be applied in the classroom within this IDM model. The author emphasizes the necessity to make theories in SLA more applicable for language teachers, and highlights the potential of IDM to attain this connection. As an initial step, this paper explains the IDM framework and how it is applied in practice; then it describes FonF,

how it connects to IDM, and how it can be used within the language classroom. Finally, the paper presents some further implications for research and practice.

INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

Instructional decision-making as a framework for studying and understanding teachers' work has been frequently described by teacher educators and researchers in general education for the last four decades. Defined as the pre-active, interactive, and post-active process that takes place before, during, and after teaching (Jackson, 1968; Clark & Peterson, 1986 as cited in Reynolds, 1992, and Westerman, 1991), the IDM process includes a preliminary assessment to diagnose students' knowledge and connect it to the unit and lesson goals; a preparation of teaching strategies aligned with the initial assessment and goals to be reached in the unit or lesson; and a final follow-up assessment to monitor whether the learning goal has been attained or additional instruction is required (Corno & Snow, 1986). Reynolds (1992) provides a summary of the complete process as follows in Table 1.

I.	Pre-active tasks
	Comprehend content and materials
	Critique content, materials, and teaching methods
	Adapt content, plans, and materials
	Prepare plans, materials, and physical space
II.	Interactive tasks
	Implement and adjust plans during instruction
	Organize and monitor students, time, and materials during instruction
	Evaluate student learning
III.	Post-active tasks
	Reflect on teaching and students' learning in order to improve practice
	Continue professional development
	Interact with colleagues

Table 1. Teaching Task Domains (Reynolds, A., 1992, p. 4).

In order to exemplify how IDM takes place in a real language teaching classroom, the following excerpt will exemplify the IDM process as reported by one Spanish student-teacher in The United States. For the purpose of this paper, the original description has been divided into the three different stages of the IDM described above: a pre-active stage of planning, an interactive stage of adapting teaching, and a post-active stage of reflecting on actions and students' learning.

Pre-active stage of teaching

I had originally planned to introduce the new vocabulary with a TPR approach. While modeling the new clothes and color vocabulary, I had also planned to make corrections of the students' grammar while prompting them to speak and answer questions. This grammar correction was to teach the students that they must always, in speaking and writing, make the subjects (here clothing) match the adjective (here colors). After modeling this several times with the new vocabulary, I had planned to quickly move on to the clothes card activity (Fichas de Ropa) so we would have ample time for the group presentations (Desfile de Ropa).

Interactive stage of teaching

I actually modified my plan due to the response of several students. It [the plural form in adjectives and the noun-adjective order in Spanish] is a hard concept to grasp because it does not exist in English. I had to teach the students always to say “los pantalones rojos” or “la camisa amarilla”. When students made the colors plural or feminine (ending in ‘a’) to match the clothes, they put the words in the wrong order. Or when they had the words in the correct order, they did not make the color match the clothing item. In Spanish they say “the pants red” or “the shirt yellow,” as noted above. In English we use the reverse word order, “the red pants” or “the yellow shirt”. We also do not make the adjectives plural or change their gender. Many students could not grasp that because the word pants (pantalones) is plural, the pants needed to be “reds” (rojos). With a particular student, I knew I needed to spend much more time on the grammar lesson before moving on to an independent activity. No matter how many times I called on the student and corrected her mistakes, each time I came back to her during the lesson, she continued to use the wrong word order and did not change the adjective to make it gender or number sensitive. After realizing that the students needed more time, I simply pushed back the rest of my lessons. To help the students I went over several more examples on the board that day. Then I made several overhead transparencies with examples with missing words.

Post-active stage of teaching

In the next class period, before beginning the individual assignment, I went over the overhead transparencies and asked the students who struggled the day before to fill in the correct adjective or clothing item, making it match in number and gender. I did this because I felt the students needed more work on the grammar part of the lesson, and it helped them master the learning goal. (Goal # 3) (Anonymous author, 2003, p.10)

As can be seen in this example, the IDM process in any language classroom involves a variety of simultaneous tasks that demand high levels of expertise and knowledge. Based on the previous example, it is clear that IDM includes making accurate assumptions and hypotheses about what happens in the classroom; focusing on events that have instructional significance; identifying students' cues to adapt the original lesson; considering a wide variety of instructional goals; and implementing a varied range of instructional actions (Fogarty, Wang, & Creek, 1983; Henry, 1993).

From an SLA perspective, IDM involves changing the method planned to teach a grammar point; using L1 and L2 to clarify students' doubts; giving clues to help understanding; and exemplifying (Vanci Osam & Balbay, 2004). IDM in language teaching also includes providing appropriate feedback and using different error correction techniques (Lyster & Ranta, 1997); explaining concepts and procedures; and focusing students' attentions and efforts (Akyel, 1997). At the same time, IDM demands teachers' knowledge of different possibilities concerning grammar instruction and its connection with issues such as grammar rule complexity, scope, reliability and the multiplicity of rules (Hulstijn, 1995).

To sum up, besides experience and familiarity with the students and context, IDM in language teaching involves specific pedagogical and subject knowledge of theories and issues that affect students' learning and teachers' work. In order to be more effective practitioners, teachers require making a clear connection between theories from research and practice within the language classroom, something that, as expressed above, is regularly neglected in research literature. In what remains of this paper the author will explore how some specific theories in SLA may contribute to fill in this gap.

The Variety of Research Trends in SLA

Mitchell and Myles (2004), reviewing different major theories in SLA, present a wide compendium of scientific claims and schools of thought in the area. The list includes Universal Grammar which, based on Chomsky's theory of principles and parameters, claims that in SLA "principles of language do not need to be learned as they are already built into the mind" (Cook, 1994, p. 28), implying that linguistic features that conform to Universal Grammar do not need to be taught explicitly. The list also comprises the Input Hypothesis, which supports the idea that language input is sufficient for language acquisition (Krashen, 1982); the Interaction Hypothesis, according to which the combination of selective attention, negotiation of meaning, and negative feedback through interaction facilitates language development (Long & Robinson, 1998); and the Output Hypothesis according to which input is not sufficient and instead, language production in the form of speaking and writing should be resorted to provide learners with opportunities to develop language accuracy (Swain, 1985). The list could be further expanded if sociolinguistic and socio-critical theories of language learning as well as the influences that authors such as Vigotsky, Piaget, Giroux, and others in the field of SLA, were to be explored, or if every research perspective were divided into their different theoretical and practical possibilities (see e.g. Doughty & Long, 2003).

Because the purpose of this paper is to establish a connection between SLA research and practice in language teaching by using IDM as a framework for analysis, one approach in SLA theory that has emerged as a good alternative for teachers and researchers has been selected to exemplify this connection. This approach integrates different theoretical trends that are currently discussed, offers more applicability for teachers and students than many other research and theoretical issues addressed in the SLA literature, and provides further insight about IDM in language teaching.

Focus on Form as a Possible Alternative to Connect Theory and Practice

Focus on Form (FonF) has been described in recent literature as an integrative approach with a variety of practical implications for teachers and students, and one in which different theories converge. As opposed to traditional language teaching approaches such as grammar translation that emphasized the synthetic and structural study of isolated parts of the language or particular linguistic FormS (notice the difference between FonF and Focus on

FormS), or the interactionist theories that placed all their attention on meaning without paying attention to accuracy or correctness, FonF emerges as an alternative that *emphasizes meaning and interaction with occasional explicit attention to forms as they spontaneously occur* within the classroom (Long & Robinson, 1998). From this perspective, grammar teaching, for instance, is perceived “as a resource rather than as an end in itself” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 25), for which authors such as Doughty and Williams (1998) have stated that “focus on form *entails* a focus on formal elements of the language, whereas focus on forms is *limited* to such a focus, and focus on meaning *excludes* it” (p.4).

FonF can be included as one of those approaches that embrace what Hulstijn (1995) has called a “weak interface position” according to which an explicit teaching of grammar can foster the acquisition of the new language, thus supporting the introduction of forms in language teaching. This perspective opposes a “non-interface position” theory which claims for the existence of a core of universal grammar rules that do not need to be taught and, conversely, are learned through positive evidence only in a similar way children learn their first language. FonF allows for a direct connection between meaning and correctness, two linguistic aspects that are frequently perceived as mutually exclusive in language teaching classrooms.

Although some authors refer to FonF in the limited sense of grammar teaching (e.g. Thornbury, 1999), other scholars clarify that this approach incorporates the different formal aspects of the target language (Doughty & Williams, 1998). According to them, FonF includes a variety of areas that extend from the lexicon, discourse, and phonology, to other aspects such as morphosyntax, and pragmatics. These different areas consist of both forms (e.g. lexical items, cohesive devices, morphemes, and politeness markers) and rules (e.g. devoicing, agreement, collocation, anaphora, and in-group vs. out-group relationships), highlighting the large difference between FonF and traditional approaches such as the grammar translation method, which as explained above, only placed its attention on the morpho-syntactic aspects of the language, not on the use and meaning of the linguistic code as a means of communication.

In direct connection with research in general education and pedagogy, FonF resembles the IDM process presented in the previous section, making it more applicable to the classroom setting. The pre-active and interactive processes of IDM (Reynolds, 1992;

Westerman, 1991) have been described in FonF as the proactive and interactive stances of FonF (Doughty & Williams, 1998). In a proactive posture, the teacher predicts students' difficulties with the language features involved in every task, plans the class in order to address those difficulties, and directs students' attention towards those problematic forms, while maintaining a constant relationship between meaning and form. In a reactive FonF approach, the teacher monitors students' responses and difficulties with a task, and adapts the original lesson by explaining those specific language features students may struggle with, and may affect or impede successful communication and transference of meaning. A reactive stance towards FonF resembles what educational researchers have described as adaptive teaching, interactive instruction, or improvisational teaching (Kagan & Tippings, 1991).

These similarities between FonF and previously studied areas of teacher education show that the IDM model may serve as a framework to connect theory and practice. Table 2 summarizes the main points to be described in the rest of the paper and how IDM and FonF are integrated within the context of foreign language teaching and learning.

I.	Pre-active stage
	Identify features for FonF
	Define timing to introduce linguistic features
	Define teaching techniques to introduce linguistic features
II.	Interactive stage
	Combine FonF with other teaching responsibilities
	Find a balance between function and form
	Consider different types of error correction and their possible effects
III.	Post-active stage
	Reflect on FonF and its effects on students' learning and teacher work
	Evaluate language learning as a long-term process
	Evaluate FonF as a long-term curricular decision
	Consider models for implementation of FonF

Table 2. Integrating IDM and FonF.

The Pre-active Stage of IDM and FonF

In this initial stage of planning, the teacher makes decisions about learning goals, lesson content, forms to be addressed, teaching approach, and tasks to be completed. Harley (1993, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 1999) states that in order to identify features for FonF, the teacher needs to consider those forms that require explicit teaching and those that do not. The author recommends FonF for those features that “ a) differ in non-obvious or unexpected

ways from the learners' first language; b) are irregular, infrequent, or lack perceptual salience in the second language input; and c) do not carry a heavy communicative load" (p. 152), and emphasizes that language features such as high-frequency vocabulary items, features which are phonologically salient, and grammatical patterns which are congruent with the learners' first language do not require explicit teaching. This concurs with Dekeyser (1994, as cited in Spada, 1997), who recommends that explicit instruction would be desirable for "easily-stated categorical grammar rules", while implicit instruction would be more effective for "prototypes" or features that may be learned inductively (p.81). This explanation provides important insights about why, in the case of Spanish speakers learning the English language, some language features such as transparent words and the plural in nouns may not require the same amount of attention and planning for the teacher as the correct pronunciation of the past tense in its different variations.

Once the teacher has determined that some language features need to be taught, the next important decision consists of defining the most appropriate time to introduce them. According to Hulstijn (1995), a rule that is larger in scope and higher in reliability should be taught before those rules that are reduced to very specific forms and have many exceptions. Furthermore, in order to avoid students' confusion, more general explanations should be given in earlier lessons instead of exhaustive and complex rules that might be highly reliable, from a grammatical point of view, but quite hard to master from a pedagogical perspective. This would explain why the explicit teaching of articles in English, despite their recurrent use and apparent similarity with Spanish, may result quite confusing when they are presented with their complex rules and common exceptions (See Thornbury, 1999, & Yule, 1998, for further discussion of these issues).

Consequently, learners' readiness for instruction has to be considered in this planning stage. Referring to previous studies by Pienemann and his colleagues, Doughty and Williams (1998) state that "it is not possible to learn, and therefore not possible to teach, a structure that lies within a stage far beyond the learner's present stage" (p. 215), for which a previous evaluation of students' linguistic level is essential before expecting them to manage quite complex rules. This linguistic stance is debatable, however, which calls for a critical posture as regards research findings. Researchers have shown that it may be even more beneficial to expose learners to more advanced linguistic forms that may drive the students to more

advanced structures, without necessarily following a predetermined sequence of complexity (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

After having defined the features to be taught, and their timing, it is essential to consider different teaching strategies for the particular lesson. Green and Hecht (1992) suggest that mechanical categories, such as the plural of nouns, can be easily introduced as rules and contextualized with further exercises, while abstract rules or features with a heavy semantic load (the difference between tense and aspect, for instance) can be better presented in larger contexts. Hulstijn (1995) recommends that rules that will cause confusion because of their lack of clarity or because they require the use of specialized terminology to be explained should be avoided, if possible, or strongly reinforced with clear examples that can be easier to remember than the rule itself. The author also remarks that in order to define timing and teaching techniques, the teacher needs to consider rule difficulty in terms of learners' prior knowledge about the language, contrasts between foreign and first language, time required by the learner to master the rule, and purely formal vs. formal-semantic distinctions that can affect how salient the rule may result for the learner. Finally, Lightbown and Spada (1999) reinforce this idea by presenting other factors that need to be considered in this planning stage: learners' ages, motivation, and goals.

The Interactive Stage of IDM and FonF

In the interactive stage of IDM, the teacher adopts a reactive stance of FonF and makes decisions based on students' responses to the original lesson plan. In this process, the teacher is expected to attend to students' cues and difficulties, identify linguistic features students struggle with, and provide students with appropriate feedback, explanations, and practice. Among other responsibilities, the teacher is also in charge of adapting teaching to the different linguistic levels in the same class, maintaining appropriate classroom management, assessing learning, and connecting previous and new knowledge.

Because of this complexity, adopting a reactive FonF has been frequently questioned by different authors. On the one hand, this approach entails a series of challenging tasks for the teacher, which is especially pronounced when students' first languages differ, or learners perform at such a high level in the target language that the message is successfully delivered and errors go unnoticed by the teacher (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Additionally, a reactive

FonF places considerable demands on the teacher's capacity to assess the need for intervention and instantly devise on-the-spot consistent and effective FonF interventions. As probing in educational research and some previous studies in language acquisition have shown, performing these simultaneous tasks can be highly demanding for teachers, especially when they lack ample experience in the classroom (Akyel, 1997; Berliner, 1986; Fogarty et al., 1983; Vanci Osam & Balbay, 2004; Westerman, 1991) and may not know what to expect in every single lesson (Doughty & Williams, 1998).

Despite all these drawbacks, it may be perfectly argued that interactive teaching and reactive FonF exhibit a number of advantages for the teacher and learner and should be strongly encouraged in language teaching. When teaching is perceived as an interactive endeavor, students' difficulties are addressed as they arise within the language task, delving into a more significant learning for the students and a better connection between the rule and its real use in communication. Furthermore, errors made by one particular student can provide the teacher with useful information about those features that need to be explained to the whole class. Finally, from a reactive FonF perspective, there is more flexibility in the curriculum since the linguistic features are addressed as errors appear, not because the teacher or the curriculum have previously determined the forms to be addressed in every lesson (Doughty & Varela, 1998). Thus, in order to adopt the best approach in FonF, and whatever decision is at hand, it is important to remember with Doughty & Williams (1998) that the most important concern of the teacher "should always be the question of how to *integrate* attention to form and meaning, either simultaneously or in some interconnected sequence of tasks and techniques that are implemented throughout the curriculum" (p. 261).

It seems that a basic set of criteria to define which stance to adopt in FonF is desirable at this point. On the one hand, it is important to consider that not every type of error is amenable to reactive FonF, especially in those cases in which a clear and short example may suffice to please the learners' curiosity or solve a problem, instead of a superficial or extremely complex explanation that may result in students' misunderstanding or confusion (Doughty & Williams, 1998). On the other hand, in those cases in which the class shares the same L1 and errors go unnoticed as they do not disrupt communication of meaning, immediate error correction within a reactive FonF can be advantageous (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Additionally, when the overgeneralization of forms and misuse of the language is due

to the transference from L1 to L2, the provision of feedback and explicit presentation of the difference between the two languages seem to be the best alternative (Spada, 1997).

As this discussion demonstrates, knowledge about different types of error correction and their possible effects on students' learning is critical when the teacher adopts a reactive approach of FonF and adapts teaching to students' needs. In what constitutes a reference for many further studies on the role of error correction in language learning, Lyster and Ranta (1997) have provided a comprehensive framework for error correction types and their effects on students' learning. After an analysis of extensive data collected in different classrooms, these authors presented the different types of error correction summarized in Table 3.

I.	Explicit correction Explicit provision of the correct form to indicate that the student utterance is grammatically incorrect e.g. "You should say...instead of..."
II.	Recast Reformulation of all or part of a student utterance. These are generally implicit corrections of the student utterance and do not include an introductory phrase. e.g. - St: The house red is beautiful – T: The red house is beautiful. Now, let's continue... Recasts also include translations of what the student has said using L1.
III.	Clarification requests Clues indicating misunderstanding of the student idea due to inaccurate use of the language or any external factor e.g. "Pardon me?"
IV.	Metalinguistic feedback Comments or questions to guide students in finding the correct way to express an idea without explicitly providing the correct form e.g. "Can you find the error?"
V.	Elicitation Techniques used by teachers to directly elicit the correct form from the student e.g. "No, not that, it's a ..."
VI.	Repetition Teacher repetition and emphasis of the student's utterance that needs to be corrected e.g. "The dog eated?"

Table 3. Feedback Types in Language Teaching (Adapted from Lyster & Ranta, 1997).

Further analyses of these error correction techniques have provided insight about their effects on students' language performance. Although regular recasts seem to be the most common technique employed by language teachers, it is the least effective in eliciting students' immediate correction as it is an ambiguous technique that does not make students aware of their mistakes and the need to correct the error (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). For this reason, some authors have introduced alternative approaches such as corrective recasts, in

which the teacher draws the student's attention to the mistake by repeating the sentence that contains the error, proceeds to produce an accurate version of the student's idea, and then asks the student to imitate the corrected sentence. Corrective recasts are found to avoid the ambiguousness of a simple reformulation by the teacher since a student's mistake is made salient before the teacher paraphrases the idea and asks the student to repeat the sentence correctly (Doughty & Varela, 1998).

Some caveats seem to be important in terms of error correction. It is acknowledged that a discrepancy between students' and teacher's perceptions of the usefulness of corrective feedback and explicit FonF may affect learning when either students' or teacher's expectations are not met (Schulz, 2001). Additionally, it is important to mention that despite positive findings on the role of error correction in language learning, and how different techniques may be used in a reactive FonF, a consensus about its benefits is far from being reached, leading some authors to consider error correction a bad idea in language learning and suggesting that it creates more problems for the teacher than it yields benefits for the language learner (Truscott, 1999). Despite these critical positions towards corrective feedback, the use of these techniques should be promoted within the language classroom. What these critiques imply, according to the author, is the existence of a number of techniques and the need to be critical when examining and adapting those strategies to the different situations teachers face in the classrooms. As with most of what is written in education, a comprehensive formula that may apply to every single case is far from being found.

The Post-active Stage of IDM and FonF

In the post-active stage of the IDM process, the teacher analyzes student learning and goal attainment and reflects on the entire teaching cycle (Reynolds, 1992; Westerman, 1991), thus aligning with current theories and practices on reflective teaching around the globe (see e.g. Schon, 1983; Zeichner, 1994). At this point, knowledge about the principles of FonF, its effects on students' learning as well as different alternatives to improve future classes, are required by the teacher. For instance, knowing why different types of error correction may have different effects on students' learning may be beneficial when reflecting on the teacher's

work and students' performances. In the same manner, understanding why students' exposure to new forms, may result in a transitory confusion and misuse of previously studied and mastered forms may provide the teacher with further understanding about students' improvement and apparent backsliding. In addition, being aware of the fact that a pedagogical focus on advanced forms can have long-term, instead of immediate performance effects, may reduce teacher and students' stress about certain recurrent mistakes (Lightbown, 1998). Furthermore, perceiving FonF as a long term curricular decision that goes beyond the IDM process of a class, may provide understanding about the importance of feedback, recycling, and continuous use of different forms inside and outside the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). What remains of this section will present an example of how FonF has been exemplified in literature. This will provide further insights about the usefulness of the IDM model, the effectiveness of FonF in language teaching, and how teachers and students may engage in reflective teaching around a particular lesson.

FonF in Practice

Doughty and Varela (1998) have presented an insightful case study in which a teacher implemented an FonF approach in a lesson. For the purpose of this paper, this specific example has been divided into the three different stages described for the IDM process, so as to make it more concrete and applicable.

Pre-active stage of the lesson. In the pre-active stage the teacher observed the students and tried to identify a language feature they needed to improve. Then, she selected a feature according to the observation of students' difficulties, the usefulness of that form for effective communication, and the relationship between that form and the communicative tasks she planned to carry out in class. Accordingly, she designed a task in which students were asked to work in groups on the preparation of their reports, to prepare a written report of the topic studied in class, and to present it in front of the class.

Interactive stage of the lesson. Once the students worked in small groups and were engaged in the activities assigned, the teacher provided corrective recasting as the students made linguistic errors. She repeated the sentence that contained the error in order to draw the students' attention to the mistake, produced an accurate version of the students' idea, and asked for the students' imitation of the corrected sentence. When students presented their

reports to the whole class, the focus was placed on the communication of ideas, and error correction was avoided as possible. Presentations were video recorded and used as data for future classes in which students' errors were carefully analyzed.

Post-active stage of the lesson. After the lesson had ended, students were asked to hand in their reports, which were revised focusing on content and accuracy. When errors were found, they were circled and returned to the students, who were asked to correct the report in terms of its content and accuracy. The teacher could assess students' learning based on the students' performance in class as well as their written reports collected after the presentations.

Analysis of the students' performance showed positive effects for this strategy. Students showed awareness of the appropriate form by self-correcting their mistakes before the teacher had the opportunity to recast. They also began to apply the target form in different situations, and used corrective recasts when correcting each other. Furthermore, in a follow-up assessment of their performance, students showed appropriate use of the form, as opposed to the students who had not been exposed to this technique in another classroom.

After this activity was completed, students and teacher researchers provided some recommendations for these types of techniques:

- The teacher has to pay attention to both the message and the correct use of the form, which, as has been described above, may not be an easy task for the teacher.
- Teacher correction should not be addressed to many forms at the same time in order to facilitate students' understanding and correction.
- Some opportunities are more appropriate for recasting than others. For example, correcting students when they were working in small groups or in pairs was more effective and better received by students than error correction in front of the whole class, when different affective factors also concerned the students.
- Error correction should be brief and immediate, and provided when more than one student is involved in speaking.

The teacher and her students reflected on the whole cycle and provided further insights for future lessons, and FonF was found to be a very useful approach in the language classroom.

Concluding Remarks: IDM and FonF to Improve Teaching Practice and to Prompt

FURTHER RESEARCH

As presented throughout the paper, the IDM framework can be a functional model to connect theory and practice in SLA and language teaching and learning. On the one hand, it allows teachers and researchers to visualize the different domains and tasks involved in the act of teaching. On the other, by outlining these domains and tasks, it permits teachers and researchers to identify those areas that require more attention and those where specific findings can be applied more effectively. For this reason, this paper has been an initial attempt to generate the type of discussions required within the field of language teaching and learning in Colombia. It has reinforced the need to make SLA research more connected to practice and reinforced the possibility for teachers to illuminate teaching practice with research, while initiating their own inquiry process in order to improve their performance and generate their own context-bound knowledge.

As a real example of how theory may be connected to practice and to illustrate the kind of discussions that is required in the field, this literature review has presented the enormous contribution that FonF can make to SLA researchers and practitioners. As an integrative approach, FonF allows different research perspectives to be drawn upon in providing ideas for and contributions to successful language learning and teaching. The author, as an advocate of FonF and IDM, has evidenced the importance of integrating meaning and form in a proactive stance towards language teaching, and has opened the door for further exploration of language areas such as lexicon, discourse, phonology, morphosyntax, and pragmatics, and how FonF can be incorporated as part of language lessons in these different areas. This paper has also called attention to the role of error correction, timing, rule complexity, and students' readiness, and how these aspects should be considered before, while and after teaching. This paper may serve as a conceptual base for further exploration within a foreign language context. Additional research and inquiry on these enlightening matters should be expected in the near future in order to continue to improve language teaching and learning in Colombia. This paper was aimed at initiating this hard work.

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