‘Dealing with’ unexpected learner contributions in whole group activities: an examination of novice language teacher discursive practices

Drew S. Fagan*

TESOL Program, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA

The current paper examines the discursive practices of one novice English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher ‘dealing with’ learners’ unexpected contributions in whole group classroom interactions during teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. The study draws from two fields of research: classroom discourse studies investigating teachers addressing learner contributions in classroom interaction, and language teacher education research showing teacher expertise as a factor in the construction of classroom communication. Using conversation analytic methods, two initial practices emerged from the novice teacher’s video-recorded data: glossing over learner contributions and assuming the role of information provider. These practices are presented with a focus on the sequential environments in which they occur and the various interactional resources used to construct them. The paper concludes with a discussion of how these findings contribute to both the classroom discourse and language teacher education literatures.

Keywords: teacher talk; language teacher education; conversation analysis; discursive practices

Introduction

Examinations of language learners’ participation in classroom interactions have long been a focus of research within applied linguistics, particularly as various second-language acquisition (SLA) theories concur that participation is a potential opportunity for learning (see Gass and Mackey 2006; Lantolf and Poehner 2011; Long 1996). Furthermore, van Lier (2008, 163) asserts that ‘learning depends on... the initiative of the learner, more so than any “inputs” that are transmitted to the learner by a teacher’. In keeping with this idea, language teachers are expected not only to manage the imparting of new knowledge to students but also, more importantly, to work with whatever expected or unexpected knowledge learners bring to classroom interactions. Understanding the importance of teacher communicative practices in the language-learning process has led to an influx of research over the past few decades in two scholarly fields: classroom discourse and language teacher education. Classroom discourse studies from various discourse analytic approaches have investigated how teachers address learner contributions; this has included studies from a conversation analytic viewpoint examining the sequential construction of these interactions. Not taken into account in these studies, however, is how teachers with

*Email: dsf2114@columbia.edu
varying levels of language instruction expertise factor into these constructions. Concurrently, the field of language teacher education has presented teacher expertise as directly affecting a teacher’s communicative practices. This research, however, has yet to utilise a microanalytic lens investigating the systematic construction of these practices in situ. In bridging these two fields of research, the purpose of the current study is to explore one novice English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher’s “dealing with” unexpected learner contributions as they surface in whole group interactions.

Background

To orient the current study, two fields of literature are first discussed and juxtaposed: (1) classroom discourse studies illustrating how language teachers address learner contributions; (2) language teacher education research examining teacher expertise as a factor in classroom communication.

Addressing learner contributions in classroom discourse

As various SLA theories stipulate that learner participation in classroom interaction is an opportunity for language learning, one strand of classroom discourse studies has focused on teacher communicative practices, for teachers are the interlocutors who most often manage learners’ interactions and direct the communicative flow of the class (Allwright 2005; Cazden 2001; Johnson 1995). While learner participation has been shown to be enhanced during pair and small-group work, thus allowing for greater insight into learner language understanding and usage (see for example Hellermann and Pekarek Doehler 2010; Mori 2002), whole-group activities have traditionally been critiqued as minimising this, as by nature they are being more teacher-fronted and focused on the teacher’s set agenda (Crookes and Chaudron 2001). In addressing this assertion, this section presents research on teachers dealing with learner contributions during whole-group activities in both teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk.

Examinations of teacher-initiated classroom interactions during whole-group activities have often occurred within the context of the IRF/E sequence (Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation) (Mehan 1979a; Sinclair and Coulthard 1975). Critics have argued that this sequence minimises opportunities for participation and, thus, learning (see for example Nystrand 1997; Tharp and Gallimore 1988), while others have found that teachers can utilise their turns in the sequence to promote such opportunities (see for example Hall and Walsh 2002; Nassaji and Wells 2000; Toth 2011). In particular, analyses of the feedback/third turn depict the important role teachers play in the learning process when dealing with learner contributions. In its most basic form, teachers can use the turn to simply acknowledge what the learner said (e.g., ‘oh’, ‘okay’) (Mehan 1979b) or to provide evaluations (Cazden 2001; Mehan 1979a). It is often found that subsequent learner participation becomes limited when strict evaluations are given. For example, classroom participants can orient to an explicit positive assessment (EPA) (for example ‘very good’) as closing the current topic regardless of whether there are unresolved issues (Waring 2008; Wong and Waring 2009). In Walsh’s (2002) study, the teacher’s use of echoing at potential evaluative turns obstructed learner participation when its purpose was not clarified (amplification, clarification, or error correction, for example). Other studies
have investigated the prosodic cues used with evaluative turns and find that students could orient to the various prosodic cues and not the lexicon as providing strict positive or negative feedback (see for example Fagan 2012; Hellermann 2003).

When the teacher’s third turn is used for more than evaluation, it allows for further ‘dialogic interaction’ between interlocutors (Hall and Walsh 2002, 190). Regardless of whether or not learners have provided the expected response, teachers can use these feedback turns can promote dialogic interaction by: (1) acknowledging learners’ responses regardless of correctness and build upon those ideas subsequently in the activity (e.g. Cullen 2002); (2) seeking clarification or asking for confirmation of a prior turn (e.g. Lee 2007); (3) encouraging learners to elaborate on their turn (e.g. Liu 2008; Wells 1993); or (4) promoting learner-learner interactive dialogues when met with non-response to a teacher’s initiation (e.g. Antón 1999).

More recently, classroom discourse studies have begun to analyse teacher responses to learner initiations of sequences-of-talk. It has been found that teachers could encourage sequence continuation when a learner initiates a topic unfamiliar to the teacher, or even abandon their lesson plan to pursue the initiation if the teacher deems it necessary as part of the learning process; this has been shown in varying contexts of English language education, including in both ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic settings (Richards 2006), in ESL elementary classes (Hawkins 2007) and in ESL community-based programmes for adult learners (Kahn 2008). Certain instructional practices in response to learner-initiated sequences have also been found to restrict subsequent learner participation. He (2004) shows how a Chinese language teacher can bypass a learner’s topic initiation to something perceived as outside the pedagogic focus of the lesson, while in Markee’s (1995) study a teacher’s use of counter-questions transforms communication activities from learner-centred to teacher-fronted assessments of knowledge. Other studies have highlighted the specific environments in which teachers pursue or close learner-initiated sequences. In her conversation analytic examination of unsolicited learner participation, Jacknick (2009) summarises the sequential environments in which learner-initiated participation can occur; (1) following a teacher prompt for an initiation; (2) following another student’s initiation; (3) within teacher turns in progress; (4) at activity boundaries. Utilising this division, Jacknick (2011) finds that learner-initiated sequences done in overlap with the teacher’s attempts to move on can be shut down. Conversely, Waring (2009) illustrates that at major sequential boundaries in a lesson (such as the end of an activity), there can be an allowance for a learner-initiated sequence (such as calling into question the correctness of an answer in the activity).

Classroom discourse studies have shown how teachers address learner contributions at different turns of whole-group interaction, whether in teacher- or learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. As the literature implies, definitions of expected or unexpected learner contributions vary. Orienting to a learner’s response to a teacher-initiated sequence as expected or not can be said to lie on a continuum ranging from a sole correct answer being labelled an expected contribution (see for example Lin 1999) to contributions which, while perhaps not what the teacher envisioned, are still pedagogically relevant and, thus, are oriented to as ‘expected’ (see for example Wells 1993). Learner-initiated sequences, which consist of turns both solicited and unsolicited by the teacher (Jacknick 2009), could in and of themselves be considered unexpected. Nevertheless, they may still yield opportunities for language learning as deemed necessary by the teacher in the immediate teaching context (see for example Waring 2011), thus making them pedagogically
appropriate for the interactive context. Because of the diverse uses of the term, the
definition of 'unexpected contribution' for this study will emerge from the data-
driven analysis examining what the teacher orients to as an unexpected learner
contribution as per her verbal and nonverbal conduct in the interaction.

Teacher expertise and classroom communication

As a growing field of research inquiry, language teacher education (LTE) has
provided much empirical evidence portraying the language teacher as a factor in pro-
moting classroom learning (Burns and Richards 2009; Johnson and Golombek
2011). Research examining language teacher expertise specifically has led to an
influx of knowledge regarding teachers' practices, the reasoning behind them, and
their effects on classroom learning (Borg 2011). Although there are as 'yet no estab-
lished common criteria for identifying experts' in the field per se (Tsui 2009, 190),
the work done on language teacher expertise has taken cues from research in cog-
nitive psychology and general teacher education. Based on analyses of child and adult
intellectual development, as well as the development of artificial intelligence, cog-
nitive psychologists describe expertise as the ability and methods one utilises to work
on a cognitively demanding task in relation to the person's cognitive ability within a
knowledge-rich domain (Berg 2000; Sternberg 1999). As Dreyfus and Dreyfus
(1986) explain, expertise is examined from the perspective of 'knowing how' one
uses knowledge to accomplish problem-solving tasks, as opposed to focusing on the
decontextualised knowledge one possesses about a topic ('knowing that'). With this
research focus, numerous studies have differentiated experts from novices in task
performance. Individuals found to be on the novice end of the continuum tend to
deal with problems from a more superficial, short-term perspective, not accounting
for the underlying long-term conceptual issues of the situation at hand. This has led
many to conclude that novices are bottom-up processors of a situation, as opposed to
experts, who are more top-down (Foley and Hart 1992; Glaser 1987).

In bringing these concepts to teacher education, Beretier and Scardamalia (1993)
emphasise that one distinguishing characteristic of an expert teacher is their willing-
ness to take on a problem that will increase their expertise, such as continuously
experimenting and reflecting on different classroom management techniques both
'in-action' (that is, in the moment) as well as 'on-action' (subsequent to the lesson)
(Schön 1983). Novices, however, 'tackle problems for which they do not need to
extend themselves' (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1993, 78). This idea is furthered by
research that depicts novices as: (1) following context-free rules of engagement with
learners in a classroom (for example giving praise for all correct answers) (e.g.
Berliner 1994); (2) having difficulty addressing or being able to address issues not
previously planned for as they arise in interaction (e.g. Westerman 1991); and (3)
having difficulty in reconciling different domains of knowledge into their classroom
practices, such as bridging learning theory, contemporary teaching methodology,
and curricular demands (e.g. Livingston and Borko 1989; Tochon and Munby
1993).

Within the field of language teacher education, teacher expertise has been closely
aligned with the concepts of language teacher knowledge and teacher cognition
(Borg 2011; Tsui 2003). An expert language teacher is viewed as one who possesses
numerous domains of knowledge needed for language instruction and implements
that information in classroom practices. As Richards and Farrell (2005) describe, this
includes having knowledge of, among other domains, (1) subject-matter, most commonly referring to linguistics, second language acquisition theories, and contemporary teaching methodology (see Bartels 2005); and (2) pedagogical expertise, including adding to one's repertoire of teaching and improving one's ability to create an atmosphere conducive to the needs of the specific learners so as to maximise opportunities for language learning (e.g. Cribbonton 1999, 2008).

While the knowledge a teacher possesses illustrates their 'knowing that' (see Dreyfuss and Dreyfuss 1986), Tsui (2005, 168) reiterates that 'show[ing]'... the expert's action' is of utmost importance to expertise research. In other words, the exemplars of 'knowing how' to put that knowledge into practice show where on the expertise spectrum a teacher lies. In her multiple case studies of English language instructors and their development of expertise, Tsui (2003) triangulatates various forms of data including focus groups, journal writings, and glosses of classroom discourse interactions. She finds that classroom interactions are particularly difficult for novice teachers to contend with since they are multidimensional, immediate and unpredictable (2003, 138), thus making it difficult for teachers to pre-plan for all possible interaction types. While the expert teacher participants in Tsui's study expressed the ease with which they felt they could respond to events with automaticity and improvisation in unpredictable situations, the novices not only expressed concern over doing this but also showed difficulty, in classroom interactions, in responding to learners' spontaneous questions without veering away from their planned lesson. Additionally, they were unsure about how to be selective in deciding which events were worth pursuing and which were not; the experts, however, were more apt in doing so and asserted that divergences from activities could be potential opportunities for learning that had not been considered during lesson planning.

The research examining teacher expertise in action provides a peripheral perspective of novices' difficulties when working with the 'unpredictable' in classroom interactions. However, Tsui's (2003) study is representative of only a small number of studies in language teacher education which include data from actual classroom interactions in situ, a gap which has been noted by some prominent scholars as necessary to fill in future research within this field (see Borg 2006, 2011). Of the studies utilising discourse data, to date most have not taken into account the intricate constructions of classroom communication, which may mean they fail to detail the systematic nature of novice and expert teacher talk-in-interaction.

The current study

The review presented here has bridged two fields of research that set out to explore the relationship between teacher expertise and dealing with unexpected learner contributions in real time. As shown in the classroom discourse literature, teachers encounter and deal with these contributions in both teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. These dealings have been found to occur systematically within classroom interactions; accounting for teacher expertise, however, has not been at the forefront of these studies' research agendas. Concurrently, language teacher education research reveals teacher expertise to be a factor in the construction of classroom interactions; in fact, these studies have shown that certain characteristics of teacher talk are commonplace in novices. This research, though, has not used a microanalytic lens showing the systematic nature of the teacher's 'noviceness' surfacing in classroom interactions. The current study sets out to address these
issues by examining in situ the intricate constructions of one novice ESL teacher's discursive practices when dealing with unexpected learner contributions in both teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk during whole-group activities. Discursive practices are defined here as 'talk activities... [with] many different parts and kinds' (Tracy 2002, 21). In other words, discursive practices (1) encompass the combined use of different interactional resources (such as lexicon, nonverbal conduct, prosodic cues, the use of physical materials) and (2) can be actualised in a variety of manners (for example as a single turn or over the course of many turns).

**Data and method**

The data set comes from an adult community English programme affiliated with a major university in the United States. Novice teachers are regularly scheduled to teach in this program. The teacher, Janet, a student in the university's Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certificate programme, was a native English speaker who had not taught prior to this. The course she taught was advanced integrated skills for general English usage (that is, neither for academic nor for specific purposes).

In all, five of Janet's teaching sessions (five hours) were used for this study. Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) affirm that videotaping, as opposed to audio recording, allows for more insight into the environment within which the talk-in-interaction occurs. This aligns with the concept of discursive practices, where it is necessary to understand how verbal, nonverbal and other interactional resources work together to form the practice. Janet was made aware prior to the first class that five of her lessons would be videotaped; neither the teacher participant nor the researcher knew which segments would be used for analysis, thus preventing Janet from boosting any part of her teaching. The ESL learners were also made aware of regular observations using various instruments (such as video cameras). They had the option of sitting out of camera view, although none did. The videos were transcribed with a detailed transcription key adapted from Gail Jefferson's system (see Waring 2011), allowing for a detailed examination of the interlocutors' uses of verbal and nonverbal communication (see Appendix for transcription key). Data outside of the transcripts (such as worksheets, lesson plans) were consulted only when referred to or physically handled by the interlocutors.

A conversation analytic (CA) framework was utilised in the examination of the transcribed classroom interaction, as this provides insight into the systematic construction of sequences-of-talk based on how the interlocutors orient to one another's prior turns-at-talk (ten Have 2007). In alignment with CA methodology, the specific focus of investigating novice teacher discursive practices in dealing with unexpected learner contributions emerged only after initial examinations of the data. It should be noted, though, that the overlying goal of the project was to investigate novice teacher classroom practices in situ, meaning that the study itself can be characterised as an 'applied CA study' (ten Have 2001). As opposed to 'pure CA' studies, whose objective is to 'explicate the endogenous organisation of talk-in-interaction as such' (ten Have 2001, 3), applied CA studies utilise CA findings in order to advise people on larger issues while simultaneously showing 'how talk in interaction is actually and locally organised' (2001, 7).

After accumulating a general collection of 78 sequences-of-talk that included teacher-learner interactions in whole group activities over the course of the five
lessons, reiterative line-by-line analyses showed a distinction between how the teacher responded to perceived ‘expected’ and ‘unexpected’ learner contributions. Examination of cases of unexpected learner contributions was chosen as a departing point for further analysis due to the diverse patterns used by the teacher, which appeared to show uncertainty regarding how to work with these turns; this left me with a collection of 32 sequences from the five lessons of video data. Reiterative line-by-line analyses of these cases led to the formation of two succinct categories of teacher discursive practices done by the teacher in response to learners’ unexpected contributions.

Findings
A detailed conversation analytic examination of whole group activities shows two broad types of teacher discursive practices used by Janet in response to learners’ unexpected contributions in both teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk: (1) glossing over learner contributions and (2) assuming the role of information provider. In the following sections, each practice will be examined in turn, focusing on the sequential environments in which these practices occur and the various interactional resources used to construct them.

Glossing over learner contributions
In this study, ‘glossing over learner contributions’ refers to the teacher either hurriedly or not at all addressing unexpected learner contributions as they arise in either teacher- or learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. Extract 1 illustrates Janet’s glossing over the lack of a relevant learner response to her initiation. The learners had been listening to samples of ‘huh’ in audio-taped authentic conversations and were discussing its uses as a question and answer. Janet is now inviting learners to contribute what they have learned:

Extract 1.

(1)  
1 Janet: {::nd, ((looks at watch)) (1.2) ((looks at class)) †what did you learn from this.)
2 (3.8) ((Janet scans class))
3 did you learn $a(hh)nything from this?$
4 (3.0) ((Janet scans class; Rafael smiles))
5 $rafael?you look like you’re< (. ) $go(hh)anna say so(hh)mething.$ hh.
6 (2.0)
7 Rafael: something me:an. >heh heh.<
8 (0.4) ((Rafael looks at Janet; Janet’s eyebrows are raised))
9 Janet: †o:.h-. ((nodding))
10 Helen: go ahead.
11 Rafael: (eye gaze from Helen to Janet)-*forget about it.*<
12 Janet: →<"okay." ((eyes lower))
13 (1.4) ((Rafael looks at Janet, who looks down then at the board))
14 so. I †think (0.2) some of you may have already been aware of these.
After Janet’s multi-turned solicitation attempts to the entire class (lines 1–5), in which she notices Rafael smiling, she selects him for the next turn in the sequence (lines 6–7). This puts Rafael on what Goffman (1983) refers to as a ‘platform format’, a common occurrence found in whole group classroom activities in which the one on the platform is expected to perform while others in the room are expected ‘to appreciate, not do’ (1982, 7); in other words, the learner is put on the spot for a ‘forced platform performance’ (Rampton 2007, 78), whether they are inclined to perform or not. After a 2.0-second gap already signalling a dispreferred second pair part (Levinson 1983), Rafael provides the answer ‘something mean’, followed by some laugh tokens. Janet’s orientation to Rafael’s turn as unexpected is illustrated in two ways. First, there is a slight gap before her turn (line 10), again signalling a dispreferred response to Rafael’s turn. Additionally, the use of raised eyebrows is commonly used to illustrate surprise at an immediate prior turn (Ekman 1979). After Janet’s use of the discourse marker ‘oh’, signalling that the information has been received (Heritage 1984), Helen inserts a first pair part of a new adjacency pair prompting Rafael to continue with his idea; in line 13, moving his eye gaze from Helen to Janet, he rapidly declines. At this point it would be sequentially feasible for Janet to pursue a post expansion of the sequence, particularly since Rafael’s response in line 9 is a relevantly absent second pair part (Schegloff 2007); in other words, it is not pedagogically relevant to Janet’s initiation turn. Instead, she utilises a quiet ‘okay’ in line 14, inferring a claim of acceptance of the second pair part. While other studies have shown ‘okay’ being used in this way after a preferred second pair part (such as Beach 1993), here it is used after what can be viewed as a dispreferred response to Janet’s initiation. In so doing, ‘okay’ acts as a sequence-closing third turn, as is shown (1) by Janet in line 14 disengaging eye contact with Rafael, often a signal to end a current sequence-of-talk between interlocutors (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992), (2) by neither Rafael nor Janet furthering a post-expansion of the sequence during a viable 1.2-second gap in lines 15–16, and (3) in lines 17–18 by Janet herself continuing with the activity.

Glossing over learner responses can also occur in a situation in which the learner provides what is perceived to be an incorrect response to a teacher’s initiation. In Extract 2, Janet is introducing a listening activity where the ultimate goal is to understand discourse marker usage in ordinary conversation. The learners will listen to a role-play of two sisters-in-law carried out by Janet’s co-teachers. For the purposes of the activity, ‘sisters-in-law’ are defined as two women whose husbands are brothers. Here, Janet decides to check the learners’ understanding of the term prior to commencing the listening activity:

Extract 2.

2 Janet: 

1 they: (are going to be: (two? (puts up two
fingers)) (sisters-in-law,
(0.8) (sees the room))
right? = what does that mean.

5 Kumiko: sister of [marriage.]

6 Mimi: [husband’s] sister.

7 Janet: (pointing to Kumiko) -> they’re what? <

8 Kumiko: sister of (0.4) husband.
In response to Janet’s initiation turn in which she asks the class what ‘sisters-in-law’ means (line 4), Kumiko and Mimi respond in overlap with definitions: a sister-in-law is a ‘sister of marriage or ‘husband’s sister’ (lines 5 and 6), both of which are acceptable. Perhaps not having heard Mimi give a response, Janet asks Kumiko to repeat, which she does with an alteration: ‘sister of husband’. It is clear from the gap in line 9 and the characteristics of Janet’s turn in lines 10 and 11 that the response received from Kumiko was unexpected and is being treated as incorrect. Further indicators showing Janet’s orientation to Kumiko’s response as incorrect are slight pauses in line 10 before ‘sisters’ and ‘husbands’; this use of pausing is commonly employed by speakers to signal a need for repair with the preceding turn (Ford and Mori 1994). The uses of certain prosodic cues such as higher pitch (‘sisters’) or rising intonation (‘husbands’) are also designed to question the previous turn (Bean and Patthey-Chavez 1994). Lastly, the hurriedly asked ‘Is that right?’ is an example of a reversed polarity question (Koshik 2002) that conveys a negative assertion (‘that is not right’).

After addressing an off-topic question about homework, Janet reformulates her earlier question in lines 16–18. Note that until now there has been no addressing of Kumiko’s earlier response from line 8. Taking Janet’s question as a cue to participate, Helen, in line 20, essentially repeats Kumiko’s earlier response with a slight change from ‘husband’ to ‘spouse’. Since Janet emphasised the words ‘sisters’ and ‘husband’ in lines 10–11, Helen may be orienting to Janet’s rejection of Kumiko’s answer as a problem with gender. Helen’s answer is also treated as incorrect, as seen (1) in lines 21–22 with Janet’s use of another reversed polarity question (Koshik 2002) addressed to the entire class, and (2) in line 24 where, unlike with Kumiko’s answer, Janet echoes Helen’s answer using rising intonation to signal
incorrectness (Bean and Pathey-Chavez 1994). At this point, Janet has used multiple interactional resources at multiple turns throughout the sequence, indicating that there are issues with the responses being given, but has not addressed the reasons for such. It is co-teacher Lisa, in line 25, who acknowledges Helen's response as one potential definition, with Janet displaying confirmation of this in lines 26 and 28. Aligning with the language teacher education literature, though, Janet continues to pursue her pre-planned definition of 'sisters-in-law' by leading learners towards the answer in lines 28–29 with the use of lexical, prosodic and nonverbal cues. Possibly due to the lack of explicit guidance linking their knowledge of 'sisters-in-law' with Janet's expected response, the learners do not display understanding in line 30, leaving Janet to give the answer in line 31.

Unlike the previous two extracts focusing on responses to unexpected learner contributions in teacher-initiated sequences, Extract 3 illustrates this discursive practice in a learner-initiated sequence. The extract occurs 10 lines after Extract 2, as Janet begins the listening activity in which her co-teachers, Lisa and Judy, will role-play two sisters-in-law deciding where to go on vacation:

Extract 3.

(3) 1 Janet: {{((to co-teachers))}- shall we beg-;}
2 Helen: bu- but what happen to: for instance (0.2) mrs. john smith and-
3 mrs. (0.4) bill smith let's say [for instance.]
4 Judy: [ mmm. ]
5 Helen: what's their relationship.
7 LL: [ hehehehe]
8 Rafael: [*then they are sister-in-law?] like] sister?
9 Judy: our=
10 Rafael: =your husb[and,]?
11 Evelyn: [are ] we wrong?
12 Lisa: ou-() my husband,
13 Rafael: =>u-huh? an-c=
14 Lisa: =is [her- ((nods to Judy))] husband's brother.
15 (0.8)
16 Janet: yeah.* ((looks from Lisa to Rafael))
17 Rafael: $confusing.$ ((laughter))
18 Lisa: in english she's my sister-in-law.
19 Janet: <okay.- ((smiles at Lisa))
20 Rafael: <|Interesting.
21 Evelyn: ((tilts head in confused look to Lisa)) <- bu[ t, ]
22 Janet: <okay.- ((looks towards Lisa)))
23 towards Evelyn))
24 Helen: so () why don't you tell the story.
25 Ana: <yeah. †why don't you.
26 Judy: okay. [so. {Sh]ey.¬((looks towards Lisa))]

After Janet signals the initiation of the activity in line 1, Helen interrupts (Bilmes 1997), beginning an aside sequence not in the planned lesson. Janet's use of nervous laughter in line 6 shows her orientation to the learners' continued discussion of the sisters-in-law as unexpected (Glenn 2003). Co-teacher Lisa explains how the two women in the subsequent listening activity are sisters-in-law: her
husband is Judy’s husband’s brother (lines 12 and 14). Rafael states how confusing this definition is to him in line 17, which is followed by Lisa stating that this is one definition of sisters-in-law in English. In line 19, Janet’s use of ‘okay’, commonly employed near the end of a sequence (Beach 1993; Schegloff and Sacks 1973), is used towards Lisa, who has taken part in the majority of the aside sequence with the learners. This is said with a jumpstart, allowing Janet to self-select the turn before anyone else. After Rafael’s jumpstarted ‘interesting’ assessment in line 20 to Lisa’s turn in line 18, Evelyn self-selects the next turn and appears to request further clarification of this topic, as is shown by the combined tilt of her head and the use of the contrastive discourse marker ‘but’ (Bell 1998) to signal either further contrastive information to what has been said or to contrast with the potential close to the sequence. With the second ‘okay’ in line 22, numerous characteristics show Janet more strongly attempting to end further discussion on the topic: (1) an interruptive overlap with Evelyn’s attempt at continuing the sequence; (2) stress and elongation of the initial sound in an attempt to take over and maintain the turn; (3) her eye gaze now on the learners as opposed to the other co-teacher, explicating to whom she is addressing the ‘okay’. The ‘okay’ is also oriented to by the learners as signalling a close to the sequence; it is Helen who self-selects in line 24 to prompt the co-teachers to begin the listening activity, which is further supported by another learner, Ana, in line 25. Even though there is evidence from the transcript that Evelyn’s potential issue with the term ‘sister-in-law’ is not yet resolved (line 21), there is an explicit end to the sequence and a continuation to the planned listening activity.

The extracts presented in this section illustrate specific exemplars of Janet systematically glossing over unexpected learner contributions in both teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. This can occur in the environment of receiving a relevantly absent second pair part to the teacher’s initiation; as opposed to pursuing a relevant response from the learner, which would be sequentially feasible, the teacher instead closes the sequence and moves on to other matters. Glossing over unexpected learner contributions also happens when receiving acceptable responses that do not match what was anticipated. In these instances, the teacher signals that the responses are problematic but does not specify the issues. In learner-initiated sequences-of-talk, glossing over can occur in the environment of learners demonstrating continued confusion of a topic after it has been addressed by others (i.e. the teacher herself, other teachers, other students); here, the teacher closes the sequence whether or not all learners have displayed uptake to the concept and moves on with the next planned activity.

**Assuming the role of information provider**

‘Assuming the role of information provider’ includes cases of the teacher providing information on a topic in lieu of learners, even when they have been invited to do so or have initiated the topic themselves. In Extract 4, Janet assumes the role of information provider when learners display difficulty in responding to her initiation. Prior to this extract, the learners wrote letters using various idioms, exchanged their letters with partners, and were then told to read the partners’ letters aloud to the class. The first letter has just been read:
Janet first asks the learners for different expressions they heard in this first letter. Lily self-selects to provide one possible answer (lines 8 and 10), which Janet acknowledges (line 11). Janet then refers back to the text to find the original usage of the expression ‘drive me to drink’, and asks if the learners understand its meaning from the context. During this 1.4-second gap, there is neither a verbal response nor a nonverbal display of the learners attempting to respond to her initiation (lines 21–22). A lack of a response at a turn relevant place would therefore be treated not only as dispreferred (Levinson 1983) but also as unexpected for the teacher. At this point, Janet has different but sequentially viable options for proceeding. First, she could provide a longer waiting time for students to consider the idiom. Although some may argue that 1.4 seconds is a sufficient wait time for an answer, it is necessary to review the difficulty of the question being asked in relation to the appropriate wait time allotted (Carlsen 1991). Examinations done on language learners and idioms have found that understanding an idiom is dependent on factors such as contextual embeddedness and linguistic conventions. Idioms presented in such a context that the meaning is made salient are more easily deciphered than those that are not (Cooper 1998). When the needed context is not provided, adults tend to rely
on the linguistic conventions of the idiom (Laval 2003). Given the complexity of deciphering idioms, it would not be inappropriate to have more wait time in the sequence. Additionally, Janet could select the next speaker for the sequence, including the letter writer who has knowledge of the idiom. Instead, she herself assumes the role of information provider in line 23.

Various communicative cues used in Janet's turn signal that the explanation is to be given by her alone. She initiates the turn by disengaging her eye gaze from the learners towards the letter, an action often oriented to as marking the end of a sequence (Goodwin and Goodwin 1992). Gaps between Janet's utterances; which could be utilised by others to self-select (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), are not present. Although pauses do occur within the explanation (lines 26–27), they are used to hold the learners' attention for what Janet is about to say (that is, maintaining maximum grammatical control: Schegloff 1996). Once the information is provided, the sequence is closed and the class proceeds to the next idiom (line 30).

While the previous extract shows the teacher assuming the role of information provider when learners do not provide any response to her initiation, extract 5 shows this discursive practice occurring even when learners do provide one. Here, we return to the letter writing/idiom activity. The fifth letter has just been read, and Janet now has the letter in her hand. One learner stated that the idiom 'down in the dumps' was mentioned in the letter. Another learner has asked Janet to write it on the board:

**Extract 5.**

(3) 1 Janet: ((finishes writing I really felt down in the...aps on the BB)) i really felt down (2.0) in (1.0) the dumps.
2 ((brushes chalk off herself)) - (1.0)
3 does anyone know what that means.
4 (2.0)
5 no.
6 (2.4)- ((looks at watch, then looks at BB as if thinking))
7 Kumiko: *feel bad.*
8 (.)
9 [ six feel terrible.
10 Janet: [what's du-]
11 (0.4)
12 (.)
13 (looks at Kumiko))= Yeah, six exactly. feel terrible. =
14 (looks at whole class) =>right?<= dump is no one
15 wants to go to the dump. = that's where all the trash goes.
16 turn () so () feel ((looks down at paper))= down in the
17 dumps? yeah, = i feel terrible.
18 (0.6)- ((looks at letter))
19 ((looks at letter)) but then () ↓ so (0.2) he starts off
20 feeling terrible but then he gets (0.6) angrier. what does
21 he say- what does he say towards the very end. = did
22 anyone } {catch that?-(looks at students)}

After providing an invitation for learners to define 'down in the dumps', Janet is met with a 2.0-second silence where, similar to Extract 4, learners provide neither a verbal response nor any nonverbal display of understanding. Janet's use of 'speak for
another' (that is, speaking for the learners) (Schiffrin 1993) in line 6 shows her orientation to this silence as a dispreferred response to her initiation and, thus, unexpected. After another 2.4-second gap, in which Janet looks at her watch and then the board as if contemplating, Kumiko self-selects the turn and offers 'feel bad' in a quiet voice (line 8). Not having heard what Kumiko said, in line 11 Janet begins to deal with the unexpected silence by attempting to parse (Lee 2007) her original question, overlapping with Kumiko’s reformulation of her own response (line 10). At this point, Kumiko has provided what can be perceived as an acceptable response to Janet’s initiation from line 4, although perceivably latent in the sequence. Janet, in turn, provides an explicit positive assessment (EPA) of ‘$yeah.$ exactly’ to Kumiko’s answer (line 13). At this point, Janet could either (a) move on to another sequence in the interaction, as EPAs often are oriented to by interlocutors in classroom discourse as sequence-closing (Waring 2008), or (b) ask Kumiko to further explain her answer, as she has now displayed knowledge of the idiom. Janet instead does a post-expansion of the sequence by answering her own aborted parse from line 11 and provides further information on the idiom herself. This is done through a latch with the EPA given to Kumiko in line 13, thus allowing Janet to maintain speakership of the turn. Following this information, Janet returns her attention to the letter briefly (line 18) before continuing on to the next idiom in the letter (lines 19–22).

The next extract illustrates the teacher’s assuming the role of information provider during a learner-initiated sequence. The learners had been focusing on pragmatic appropriateness in varied situations and had been given different scenarios in which they were to decide the appropriateness of using fillers in conversations. The last of the five scenarios to be discussed concerned how one would ask an elderly person to repeat something that was said. Miwa is now providing a response:

Extract 6.

(6) 1 Miwa: we have to say (.), could you please repeat after pardon.
     2 Janet: $yes.$
     3 Miwa: <to make it complete.
     4 Janet: exactly. {((starts to move towards BB))- yeah.}
     5 ((1.2)- ((Janet erases BB to start final activity))
     6 Rafael: if i- if [ i if i want to ask for = ]
     7 Janet: [((body torque- BB; gaze at Rafael))] = an older person to repeat "something."
     8 Rafael: >mhm?<= ((continues erasing))
     9 Janet: (0.2)
    10 Rafael: can i say (.) SAY IT AGAIN.
    11 Janet: what do you think?- ((looks at board and erases))
    12 Rafael: no. [It i-]
    13 Janet: → [NO:]: {((body torque to Rafael))- exactly.
    14 exactly.< }= i think (.) for an} {((returns to erasing the
    15 BB))- older person you might say "excuse me? um. i
    16 didn’t hear you." >you know.< }and then you add
    17 something else on to that after the excuse me o::
    18 "pardon?" you know (.) just to add something saying
    19 that i didn’t understand you or i didn’t hear you or
    20 ((puts hand to ear indicating volume)). {((to whole
    21 class))- okay. let’s practice.)
As Miwa provides the expected response to this final scenario of the activity, Janet gives positive feedback (lines 2 and 4) and then proceeds to the blackboard to erase it in preparation for the next activity. As early as line 4, Janet’s change of her body torque and eye gaze away from the learners towards the blackboard infers that, from her perspective, the sequence has come to an end (Schegloff 1998); as the last scenario for the activity, these actions also imply that the activity as a whole is at a potential ending point. After a 1.2-second gap, Rafael takes the opportunity to self-select the turn in line 6 and proceeds to start a new unexpected sequence relating to the final scenario. Rafael’s action at this juncture of the interaction parallels Waring’s (2009) findings showing that at these sequential boundaries interaction could allow for learner-initiated negotiation of the immediate prior topic. Janet, in overlap with Rafael in line 7, gives him her eye gaze, but her body torque remains towards the board while she erases. Aligning with Schegloff’s (1998) analysis, this shows Janet doing multiple courses of action, but with her main focus still on the board (as shown by the lower half of her body) and only her secondary focus on Rafael. Rafael provides a multi-unit clarification turn (lines 6, 8, 11), culminating in a yes/no question. Janet then deflects the question back to him by asking ‘what do you think’. This turn allows for a possibility of different answers, and indeed Rafael orients to it as not only providing a yes/no answer to his clarification but also as an opportunity to account for his answer. Janet, however, whose nonverbal conduct has shown her focus on preparing for the next activity, does a transitional overlap (Jefferson 1986) with Rafael after he provides the expected answer of ‘no’ (line 14), thus taking the floor from him. She then proceeds to hurriedly provide further information about Rafael’s comment (lines 14–21) before explicitly ending the sequence and moving on to the next activity (lines 21–22).

In addressing unexpected learner contributions in both teacher-initiated and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk, the data has shown Janet assuming the role of information provider in varied sequential environments. First, this can surface in a situation of not receiving a learner response to a teacher initiation. While it may be viable to allow for more wait time or select a speaker for the next turn, the teacher instead self-selects and provides the information. This discursive practice can also occur upon receiving a ‘latent response’ to a teacher initiation – that is, a response given subsequent to its preferred turn location in the sequence. At this point, the teacher has already attempted to deal with the unexpected lack of a response in the preferred turn location and continues with that even after the learner provides a latent response. Finally, assumption of the role of information provider also occurs in dealing with a learner’s initiation at a major sequential boundary in the lesson, where the teacher has already displayed preparation for moving on to the next activity. In lieu of having the learners expand on the sequence, the teacher quickly provides the information, closes the sequence, and moves the lesson forward.

Conclusion
The current study investigated one ESL novice teacher’s discursive practices in response to unexpected learner contributions that surfaced in whole group interactions during teacher- and learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. In particular, two discursive practices emerged from the video-recorded data: glossing over learner contributions and assuming the role of information provider. The former, which
showed the teacher either hurriedly or not at all addressing the contributions, occurred as learners: (1) did not provide a relevant second pair part to the teacher's initiation, in turn leading the teacher to close the current sequence; (2) did not provide the specific response anticipated by the teacher, to which the teacher signalled the response as problematic but did not provide further insight; (3) demonstrated continued issues with a topic already addressed prior in the sequence, to which the teacher would close the sequence whether or not learners displayed understanding. Assumption of the role of information provider, where the teacher provided the information on a topic when learners were initially invited to do so or initiated the topic themselves, took place: (1) as the teacher did not receive a learner response to an initiation; (2) when learners gave a latent response to an initiation subsequent to the teacher already being in the process of dealing with a lack of response in the preferred turn location; (3) when learners initiated a sequence at a major sequential boundary in the lesson where the teacher had already begun preparation for the next activity.

Given the importance placed on teacher talk as it connects to language learning opportunities in classroom interactions, the study expands on findings from previous discourse analytic research examining both teacher feedback turns in teacher-initiated sequences-of-talk, and teacher responses to learner turns in learner-initiated sequences-of-talk. In cases where the learners’ responses in teacher-initiated sequences were either non-existent, not anticipatory or latent in the sequence, the teacher’s subsequent turn would default to being self-selective or sequence-closing; uses of the turn to promote ‘dialogic interaction’ (Hall and Walsh 2002, 190), such as requesting further clarification or encouraging learners to elaborate (see for example Cullen 2002; Lee 2007; Liu 2008; Wells 1993), were not present. The examples of learner-initiated sequences are more complex to understand, in that the initiation in and of itself can be viewed as an unexpected contribution. In adding to the current increase in literature exploring learner initiatives in the language classroom (e.g., He 2004; Jacknick 2011; Kahn 2008; van Lier 2008; Waring 2011), the discursive practices presented here were found only to surface when the contributions (1) continued a topic addressed immediately prior in the discourse or (2) were attempted at a point in the interaction at which the teacher had already displayed preparation for the next activity either verbally or nonverbally. While other studies have shown the teacher’s acceptance of learner initiations and allowance for sequence-continuation, it may be the case that Janet oriented to these initiations as not sequentially viable at that moment in time due to what had occurred previously or what was to come.4

The findings also enhance our knowledge of how teacher expertise affects classroom communication practices. While the language teacher education literature has provided us with peripheral understandings of novice teacher communication, the current study has added to this by illustrating the specific interactional organisation of classroom discourse from which a teacher’s ‘noviceness’ can surface. With the expertise literature showing that novices are unsure about how to handle the multidimensionality, immediacy and unpredictability of learners’ contributions to the classroom (Tsui 2003), two practices used by Janet to deal with these issues surfaced from the conversation analytic data. First, the teacher can avoid the contributions completely or minimally address them, actions which hinder the contributions being elaborated on subsequently in the interaction and, in turn, relieve the teacher from having to address them further. Additionally, the teacher can herself take on
the responsibility to provide information that is perceived to be needed in order to continue with the lesson as planned, as opposed to risking allowing learners the opportunity to potentially not provide the desired information or disrupt the timing and flow of the lesson. Both circumstances illustrate examples of the teacher focusing on the more immediate, short-term issues commonly found with novices (Foley and Hart 1992) as opposed to considering the immediate context in relation to longer-term language learning goals (Allwright 2005). What should be further emphasised is the apparent systematic manner in which the novice teacher uses these practices within specific sequential environments, supporting the notion that there are immediate interactional cues to which the teacher orients in the construction of her talk. In other words, how the novice teacher ‘deals with’ unexpected learner contributions in classroom interactions is methodical as opposed to random.

This analysis also highlights research implications for bridging the fields of classroom discourse and language teacher education. As exemplified here, discourse analysis provides insight into ‘what’ is happening in classroom communication; the use of CA methodology further offers ‘a slow-motion detailed analysis of interaction that often occurs in real time in lightning speed’ (Waring and Hruska 2011, 453), thus accounting for all the interactional resources used by interlocutors in co-constructing sequences-of-talk. Conversely, language teacher education studies provide general guides to the ways in which expertise influences. In linking these fields, language teacher education researchers can more closely investigate expertise at various levels of development in situ while discourse analysts can account for expertise as a factor in classroom interaction outcomes, thus helping to prevent potential validity issues with research findings.

Lastly, it is important to note that while the findings presented here do not represent an exhaustive list of discursive practices carried out by Janet in response to unexpected learner contribution, nor are they a generalisation of practices across all novice language teachers, the data can be used to raise awareness of how specific characteristics of novice teacher communication surface in classroom interaction. Teachers themselves need to be cognizant of how they ‘deal with’ learners’ unexpected contributions in whole group interactions, for these contributions may be equally or even more influential than information imparted by the teacher in promoting language learning opportunities. This includes understanding the various interactional cues used in constructing teacher turns within sequences-of-talk, and knowing that those turns affect subsequent learner contributions in the classroom discourse. This study also reasserts the importance of examining the nuances of teacher/learner interaction in order to gain a fuller understanding of the teacher’s instructional practices. Teacher educators can incorporate conversation analysis with commonly utilised observation rubrics to see how specific teacher actions are constructed in situ and allow or hinder learner participation in classroom interactions.

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Notes

1. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) use the term 'non-expert' as opposed to 'novice', for they make the argument that an experienced teacher does not equate to an expert one. While this may be so, the current study's focus on novice language teacher classroom interactions purports the use of the term 'novice' so as to not confuse the specific participant population presented here.

2. For an exception to this, refer to Fagan (in press).

3. All names in this paper are pseudonyms.

4. This is an assumption based on the larger sequential construction of these examples; it is beyond the scope of the current paper to focus on Janet's thought processes.

5. While it is understood that a 'pure CA' study would not take into account anything external to the transcript data, this statement is applicable to applied CA studies as well as studies utilising other discourse analytic perspectives (see Mercer 2010).

Notes on contributor

Drew S. Fagan is a doctoral candidate and an instructor in the TESOL Program at Teachers College, Columbia University. His research interests include teacher learning and its influences on student language learning, classroom discourse analysis, and sociocultural theories of learning.

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Appendix. Transcription key

(period) falling intonation.
(?) question mark) rising intonation.
(,,) (comma) continuing intonation.
(-) (hyphen) abrupt cut-off.
(,:) (colon(s)) prolonging of sound
word (underlining) stress.
WORD (all caps) loud speech.
°word° (degree symbols) quiet speech.
↑ (upward arrow) raised pitch.
↓ (downward arrow) lowered pitch.
>word< (more than and less than) quicker speech.
<word> (less than & more than) slowed speech.
< (less than) jump start or rushed start.
hh (series of h's) aspiration or laughter.
hh (h's preceded by dot) inhalation.
(hh) (h's in parentheses) inside word boundaries.
[ ] (brackets) simultaneous or overlapping speech.
= (equal sign) latch or contiguous utterances of the same speaker.
(2.4) (number in parentheses) length of a silence in 10ths of a second.
() (period in parentheses) micro-pause, 0.2 second or less.
( ) (empty parentheses) non-transcribable segment of talk.
((gazing toward the ceiling))
((( )-words.) ( ) marks the beginning and ending of the simultaneous (indicated by the dash) occurrence of the verbal/silence and nonverbal; the absence of { } indicates that the simultaneous occurrence is through the entire turn
(ty 1)/(ty 2) (two parentheses separated by a slash) alternative hearings.
$word$ (dollar or pound signs) smiling voice.
#$word#$ (number signs) squeaky voice.
L unidentified learner
LL multiple learners
BB blackboard