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Methodological and Ethical Issues in Classroom-Based Research

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INTRODUCTION

During the last decades there has been an abundant body of research carried out in the area of second language acquisition in immersion classrooms (Cohen, 1974, 1994; Snow et al., 1975; Swain, 1984; Heitzman, 1993; Blanco-Iglesias et al., 1995; Parker et al., 1995, among many others). These studies report on the results of particular research projects that have been carried out in immersion education settings. Unfortunately, little evidence is usually reported in these studies of the process by which researchers obtained the data. While every study offers a 'methodology' section in which the researchers point out the data-gathering techniques that were used in the study, first-time researchers do not usually find a detailed record of all the steps that need to be taken in order to successfully carry out a research project.

Researchers—especially researchers who gather natural data in classrooms—need to consider an array of practical methodological issues before setting out to gather the data: personality clashes between researchers and members of the institution where the research will be carried out, schedule conflicts, bureaucracy, the institution's past experience with researchers, the importance the institution places on a particular research project, parents' consent, students' consent, data reporting, and foremost ethical issues regarding the treatment of the people data will be gathered from. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate via a particular case in point some of the issues raised above. Our hope is that by sharing our experience while carrying out classroom-based research in an immersion context, a set of tentative practical methodological guidelines will surface. To our knowledge no such set of guidelines exists in the literature on immersion classroom-based research.

CLASSROOM-BASED RESEARCH IN AN IMMERSION SETTING: A CASE IN POINT

Nunan (1992, p. 102) points out the scarcity[1] of classroom-based research studies. The author defines classroom-based research as research carried out in

> 'genuine' classrooms [...] classrooms which were specifically constituted for the purposes of teaching and learning, not to provide a venue for research (Nunan, 1992, p. 102).

[1] Liu (1991) is one of the few studies carried out in this fashion.

In reality, studies that look at naturally-occurring data in genuine classrooms are especially scarce due to the difficulties that researchers confront when attempting to carry out research of this type (Johnson, 1992). The difficulty is partly due to the nature of the data that classroom-based researchers seek in order to carry out a research project, and the complexities that are inherent to naturally-occurring data. This type of data can not be elicited but only observed. Hence, its collection depends on several factors, among them: the dynamics of the classroom (the researcher can not control the data-gathering procedure); the time it takes to gather the data (Johnson, 1992, p. 115); and the long commitment and trusting relationship that is required between the researchers, on the one hand, and the members of the speech community[2] under study, and the school, on the other.

When researchers attempt to carry out classroom-based research they face a process-oriented situation.[3] One of the goals of this process is to reach a commitment between the researchers and the school community in order to carry out the intended research. (In this paper, the notion of 'school community' refers to the school and the members of that school—the principal, teachers, aides, students, parents, cafeteria workers, library personnel, etc.).

Throughout this process, researchers will be dealing with members of the school community under study: the children from whom the data will be gathered, teachers, the school principal, other school officials and parents. Thus, the focal point in this and all data-gathering discussions needs to be framed in the context of how we, as researchers, view our subjects: as objects or as human beings (Cameron et al., 1993, p. 86). We contend that problems in classroom-based research arise when we choose to view, and treat, the members of the school community under study as mere objects from which we will gain some benefit rather than as human beings.

The position we took at the outset of our research[4] enterprise was to try to look at the research project from the perspective of the members of the school community we wished to study. We made an attempt to humanize the object of our study. In doing so we believe that many obstacles were overcome and we were able to build a trusting relationship between the members of the school community and ourselves with minimal consequences to our research project.

With this idea in mind, we will explore a process for classroom-based research taking into consideration several issues, from the conception of the idea to the reporting of the results: 1. The research idea, 2. Preliminary contacts, 3. Preliminary contacts with the institution, 4. Data gathering: legal and informed consent, and 5. Reporting on the findings. While it is true that no two

[2] A speech community is a group of people who share a set of norms in terms of language use and forms (Labov, 1972, pp. 120-121).
[3] The process entails all the steps that are involved in conducting classroom-based research.
[4] We have carried out observations and data gathering at several immersion sites in the US and elsewhere. Here we give examples drawn from one of those projects.

projects will face the same set of circumstances, we believe that by sharing one scenario, in particular, several common general methodological and ethical issues may surface.

CLASSROOM-BASED RESEARCH IN AN IMMERSION SETTING: A PROCESS

The Research Idea

All research has to start somewhere. Research ideas can come from a variety of sources. In general, it can be said that researchers obtain their ideas from their wish to expand on previous research, from discussions with advisors and colleagues, from seminars on a particular subject matter, or from an outstanding issue discussed at a conference, just to name a few. What we are trying to point out here is that preliminary research ideas are generally generated outside the community that is the object of study. That is, research projects originate, more often than not, from universities and research institutions.

The first issue that needs to be addressed is how to reconcile the academic goal of carrying out research with the feasibility of carrying it out. In the case of our particular research project, after many hours of reading literature in the general area of second language acquisition, brainstorming with our advisors, preliminary research in our field of interest (Broner, 1991; Heitzman, 1993; Parker et al., forthcoming; Tarone & Swain, 1995, among many others), among a series of factors, we decided to explore several issues pertaining to language use by students in an immersion classroom (see Blanco-Iglesias et al. for a preliminary discussion of our findings).

The general research question we sought to answer was: What languages (L1 or L2) are used by students in their interactions in immersion classrooms?

All our preliminary discussions took place in what Rounds (1994, p. 5) calls 'the safe haven of academia,' from the perspective of which any research proposal seems plausible. All research ideas are considered in terms of their contribution to the advancement of the field, availability of grants (to finance research projects), and potential publications or conference presentations instead of in terms of the actual feasibility of carrying out the study.

So, what's wrong with this picture? In our case, everything went very well until we were faced with the reality of leaving our 'safe haven' and attempted to establish our first contacts at the school. Our first surprise was the realization that we had been working under the accepted rules and regulations of the academic world, which we knew well, whereas now, we were trying to enter a different community in which we had no prior experience. Hence, no amount of previous university-based research, readings or discussions had prepared us for the task at hand.

Preliminary Contacts

Using the 'friend of a friend' technique (Milroy, 1987), we set out to find a professor at our university who could help us to make our first contact with the immersion school principal. This task is harder than expected since it relies heavily on the trust other researchers have in you (or your advisor, if you are a graduate student). There are several issues that appear to come into play when seeking a referral. These are: the referring professor's previous experience in carrying out classroom-based research (their reputation at the school), their previous experience referring other colleagues (the school might have had a bad experience with somebody referred in the past), and your ability to convince the referring professor that your proposed research project is worth his/her referral. Here, we found out that, in general, professors are willing to help prospective researchers as long as the latter don't take for granted that the professor is obligated to give them a referral. Prospective researchers need to realize that if a particular professor can give a useful referral it is because she/he has already built a trusting relationship with the community they wish to enter. This is why professors may appear extremely cautious about giving referrals as they do not want to be placed in a position in which their credibility and reputation could be harmed. From our perspective, referrals should only be seen as time-saving devices.

A referral will not automatically grant access to a community. It will only open the doors. From then on, first-time researchers are on their own. In order to succeed they will need to make decisions as to how to approach the school community. Rounds (1994) suggests that researchers need to look at the community that they wish to study from an anthropologist's perspective. That is, classroom-based researchers should put themselves in the situation in which 'anthropological fieldworkers see themselves: as visitors or strangers in a strange land' (Rounds, 1994, p. 4).

In our particular case, viewing ourselves as anthropological fieldworkers proved useful in view of the fact that we were knocking at the door of a world unknown to us. Assuming that this 'new and exotic world' (Rounds, 1994, p. 4) would operate in the same fashion as the world we were coming from would have proven fatal. One common mistake that many researchers make is to assume that introducing themselves as coming from the UNIVERSITY [*our emphasis*] will put them in an advantageous situation. On the contrary, we learned that presenting yourself to a school community as coming from a position of power which is external to the system can be counter-productive. If you are on the turf of the school community you are by definition no longer in a position of power. You are an outsider who needs to gain the community's trust.

In our view, the above-mentioned scenario occurs due to the myth, popular at the university, that if a project comes from the University it must be good. This myth is grounded in the positivist prescription that encourages the belief (on the part of both university researchers and subjects) that researchers always know what is best (Lincoln, 1990, p. 290). The reality is (though many researchers will fail to acknowledge it), that any school community that grants the university and its members permission to carry out research on its premises is doing them a favor. As Cameron et al. (1993, p. 81) point out, the whole research process 'benefits the investigator much more than the informants.' Until we, as university researchers, recognize this fact as an underlying premise in classroom-based research methodology, we will appear to be quite arrogant in our assumptions and problems will continue to surface.

Preliminary Contacts with the Institution

Preliminary contacts with the institution depend largely on the source of the research project. Although classroom-based research may be generated from different sources, we will refer to two: (1) One is by a call for research made by the school district administrators (Smith, 1990, p. 264) who contact the university researchers to analyze a particular issue that is of interest to them and (2) another is an outgrowth of research projects that have been generated at a research institution—universities, research institutes, etc. The research we are describing here is of the second kind. We had not been invited as consultants—which is often the case in assessment studies (e.g. Swain & Lapkin, 1982). On the contrary, we needed to convince the school, and later the district, that our research project could prove useful.[5]

Whatever the source, it is important to seek the cooperation of all the school members from the outset. The researcher needs to take into account the needs of the members of the community and not only his/her own. Our observations have confirmed that when members of the community feel that they have been consulted before a research project is carried out—rather than having it imposed on them—they are more open to research studies. This issue is important in view of the fact that without the cooperation of the teachers, students, and the principal any research project will fail.

The point is, then, that the members of the community need to feel that you are carrying out the research with them and not on them.[6] Hence, the first step is to present the research project to the principal and the teachers of the school.

The school principal needs to be the first person researchers contact. If he/she considers that the research project will prove valuable—at the very least not harmful—for his/her program,

[5] 'Useful' has different meanings to different people. University researchers usually present their projects to the districts or schools by promoting the idea that their research will be useful to the school. In the short term, the research project is most immediately useful to the researcher. While the project may be useful to the school in the long term, even long term benefits to the school are uncertain due to the fact that results may take years in some types of research, the researcher may run out of grant money, the researcher may move to a different line of research, to name a few.

[6] Elaine Tarone, personal communication, April 18, 1995. This idea is spelled out by Cameron et al., 1993, as an essential component of the 'empowerment' model they propose. In our case, we were not working under any particular model but the idea emerged from situations we had to confront while carrying out our research.

chances are that the research will be carried out. Nevertheless, obtaining the principal's authorization does not automatically translate into the actual feasibility of a project. If we, as researchers, view the school as a community, where each of its members has a role to play, it is important that researchers do not jump to any conclusion as to the role of each member. In other words, we felt it was not enough to gain the approval of the principal alone. That alone could not guarantee feasibility. We needed the approval of the teachers as well.

In the case of our particular project we needed to face several unforeseen issues in gaining the approval of the principal and teachers. First, the principal was skeptical of our research project mainly due to a negative prior experience with another University-generated project. We needed to show the principal that this experience would not be repeated with us.

Second, some teachers thought that we could prove useful as an instrument in their own political agendas within the school—e.g. some teachers were pushing for particular curriculum changes. We needed to make it clear to such groups that our research had nothing to do with curricular issues, but was focused solely upon the children's language output in the classrooms.

The third, and most important issue was that the teachers were suspicious that we were there to study and/or evaluate their teaching behaviors. This suspicion was especially strong for those who had not yet attained tenure and were still being evaluated by the principal. In addition, at the beginning of our project, we were not aware that even some of the tenured teachers were vulnerable in that their L2 competence was an ongoing topic of discussion within some factions in the school community. Therefore many teachers were suspicious of our ultimate goal. The teachers were not convinced that our intention was to only observe the children's language output; they suspected that we were there to study them. Surprisingly, we later learned that some teachers even believed that our intention was to get their jobs!

As researchers seeking to obtain unbiased data from the subjects (Lincoln, 1990, p. 289-90), we had not given the teachers enough information about our research project.

We believe that most of these issues surface from a fundamental premise in our field of research. To avoid the observer's paradox[7] (Labov, 1972, p. 209)—the way in which the presence of the researcher affects the typical behavior of the subjects being studied—traditionally, researchers offer vague ideas of what it is that they wish to study (Tarone, 1980, p. 385; Cameron et al., 1993, p. 83).

> [...] it is not considered unethical for the researcher to protect her own interests in various ways. She is permitted, for example, to be less than candid about the

[7] The Observer's Paradox refers to the idea that the goal of linguistic research is to analyze how (in our case what) people speak when they are not being systematically observed. Nevertheless, in order to gather these data researchers need to observe the linguistic behavior of the population under study in a systematic fashion. (Labov, 1972, p. 209) Hence, the paradox.

> ultimate purpose of her research. Many research designs require that the investigator conceal her goals: if you tell people you want them to talk so you can measure the frequency with which they pause, say, this may affect their behavior and so vitiate your results. To avoid this problem, you tell them nothing, or invent some plausible alternative rationale (Cameron et al., 1993, p. 82-83).

However, the members of our school community were aware that researchers often 'conceal [their] goals.' Teachers and principals alike had the opportunity to be suspicious of the true object of our study.

The issue is, then: how do researchers seek the support of the members of the community without biasing the research project or without jeopardizing the trust that teachers might place on them? In our case, we came to the conclusion that the only way we could overcome the social issues that had surfaced was to be sympathetic to the needs of the members of the community. We understood the risk of taking such a position since we could ultimately bias the data we wished to collect. Most importantly, we realized that if what we pursued was a trusting relationship, in which we would feel welcome as researchers, we needed to take such risks. As researchers, we needed to realize that, despite the positivist view in which linguistic inquiry is grounded[8] we could not enter the community from a completely detached and objective position. To be completely detached from the community poses a fundamental ethical problem. This problem is that when carrying out classroom-based research we do not operate in a vacuum. We can not hold one ethical code for our lives and a different code when we carry out research (Lincoln, 1990, p. 292). As Soltis (1990, p. 248) points out '...qualitative educational research cannot be value-free; it must be ethically conducted and ethically concerned.' Furthermore, Soltis (1990, p. 247) suggests that

> Ethics is ubiquitous. It permeates all aspects of our lives. For example, fairness is required of us both as professors and as parents. Honesty is essential to research quality as well as to our everyday dealings with others. A promise of confidentiality is as binding to unsavory informants as when given to friends.

In other words, if we live by an ethical code of conduct, why not live by the same standards when carrying out research?

Once we realized that we had been trying to reconcile two forces that were at odds[9] we found a way of gaining the community's trust. We simply applied our own code of ethics to our

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[8] This positivist view dictates that in searching for the truth, the researcher needs to separate herself/himself from the object of the study to avoid contamination of the data as well as value-judgement (Lincoln, 1990, p. 289-90; Cameron et al., 1993, p. 84-85).

[9] Cameron et al. (1993, p. 86) point to the fact that positivists would argue that subjectivism is at odds with the feasibility of carrying out good research. The authors believe that non-positivist methods also produce insightful and valid research.

research enterprise.[10] We started by making sure both the principal and the teachers understood the true purpose of our research. We invested the time to speak with as many teachers as we could about our project. We visited many classes often and we attended as many meetings as we were asked to attend in order to clarify any issues regarding our project. As time went by we became part of the background.[11] Teachers, children and officials alike became used to our presence. We had begun to overcome the obstacles that were confronted at the outset. The principal decided to take a risk and allow the research to be carried out; the teachers understood that we were not seeking their jobs—as some had thought; they also believed that we were not there to judge their teaching style; and finally they realized that we were not going to be of use for their curricular political agendas—this last problem was dealt with early on in the process. We made it clear that we were linguists interested in describing patterns of language use. We were not curriculum and instruction experts who would have proven more useful to their cause.

Data Gathering: Legal and Informed Consent

Our research plan could not be conceived without first carrying out observations on classroom language use. The school principal—after agreeing to our preliminary research plan—sent a letter to all teachers explaining our wish to carry out observations of the children's language use in the classrooms. Teachers were given time to respond as to whether they did or did not want to be observed. We were very fortunate that all the teachers in the school invited us to their classrooms. At this stage, our observations sought to identify the two grade levels in which we would carry out taped data collection during the following academic year. After we had observed all levels, and decided on two—third and fifth[12]—for future study, we conducted interviews with the teachers[13] in order explain our research proposal and to seek their informed consent.[14]

From our informal observations[15] we outlined a formal proposal for research to be carried out during the next school year that was to be presented for approval first to the principal—who attached a letter accepting the proposal—then to the Human Subjects Committee at the University and finally to the School District.[16]

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[10] A word of caution is needed here: ethics means different things to different people. This is why we believe that members of our research community must engage in a continuous and open dialogue to try to reach a consensus of what constitutes ethical research.

[11] Tarone personal communication, March 1994.

[12] Our preliminary observations (see Blanco-Iglesias, Broner & Tarone, 1995, for a full report on these observations) suggest that, in this school, third grade was 'immersion heaven' in which children used the L2 (Spanish) consistently in a wide array of communicative functions both in formal and informal interactions (Blanco-Iglesias in progress) whereas by fifth grade, despite having reached the highest exposure to and proficiency of the L2 available at this school site, children were choosing to use the L1 (English) even during formal classroom interactions (Broner in progress).

[13] We selected the teachers according to the following criteria: 1) that they both be of the same gender; 2) both either be native speakers or non-native speakers. In the second case we were looking for two teachers with a similar L2

Despite the fact that we believed that we had overcome all obstacles, we faced yet another setback. When we filed our formal research proposal with the University Human Subjects Committee we were told that all classroom research proposals require the University Committee's legal consent before even the first informal contacts with the school are made. This experience showed an interesting paradox.[17] In order to obtain legal permission from the University Human Subjects Committee we needed a letter from the school principal agreeing to the research proposal. But, how were we to obtain such a letter without first developing a relation of trust not only with the principal but with the teachers in the school?[18] How would we know whether our research project was at all feasible without first carrying out preliminary observations? There is not a good answer to this paradox. Hence, we were faced with a reality which we could only accept: in order to obtain the letter that the Human Subjects Committee required we had to, in a sense, violate their first requirement. Once we obtained the letter from the Principal agreeing to our research project, we filed our research proposal and the University Human Subjects Committee granted us permission to carry out our research project.

The next step was to obtain permission from the School District. This process takes time since the examining committee convenes only once a month. Our proposed project was accepted and we then sought our final (and most important) permissions: the parents' and children's informed consents. Considering the nature of the community under study, the TESOL guidelines for ethical research in ESL are pertinent. What these guidelines state is that:

> Research in our field is unique in that it focuses on a unique sort of human population—one defined by the Canada Council as "captive population." A "captive population" is one for whom a power differential is felt between the population and the experimenter, a differential which could operate to the disadvantage of the subjects. [...] What this means is that because our subjects [children in our case] may feel themselves to be at a weak end of a power differential, they may be less likely to exert themselves to defend their own rights. It is therefore doubly important for the researcher to make every possible effort to be sure that those rights are safeguarded in the study. (Tarone, 1980, pp. 383-388)

In an attempt to safeguard the rights of the children, we presented the research proposal to the children. We encouraged the children to ask questions and we made our best effort to

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competence; 3) that they would be teaching the selected grade levels the following school year.

[14] Part of our spoken contract with the principal was that we would not take any further steps without the informed consent (TESOL, 1980, p. 384) of the teachers with whom we would carry out our project. In this case, once we decided on the two teachers we wanted to work with, we regularly spoke to them to verify that they were aware of our research intentions and why we had chosen their third and fifth grades.

[15] See Blanco-Iglesias, Broner & Tarone, 1995, for a full report.

[16] Each university has different rules and regulations with regard to which type of research needs permission from the Human Subjects Committee.

[17] Elaine Tarone, personal communication, April 19, 1995.

[18] As outlined on pages 7-8.

develop a relationship of trust between ourselves and the students. We explained—in a language appropriate to each grade level—what we were going to study and how we were going to collect the data. Furthermore, we assured the children that they did not have to be part of this project if they chose not to participate. We also assured them that their right to privacy and anonymity would be safeguarded (Tarone, 1980). The children were enthusiastic with the fact that their classroom had been selected for the study. They were all eager to participate and every one of them wanted to be picked as one of the three children who would be wearing the microphone.

However, it is important to point out that, despite all precautions, there is always the risk that children may feel pressured to be part of a particular study. We, as researchers, should not lose sight of this possibility and should be willing to rectify/change the original course of action if necessary (Tarone, 1980, p. 384).

Our experience has shown that the best way to ensure the contract between the school community and the researchers is by treating teachers and children as co-researchers—we must admit, however, that this role is more clear in the case of teachers than children. Teachers and children hold insight (about their language behavior) that can be very valuable to researchers, and that insight is more likely to be shared if the teachers and students feel themselves to be engaged in the research endeavour as well.

> A great deal of knowledge researchers produce is constructed out of knowledge their research subjects already possess. [...] [it] becomes 'original' [authors' highlight] only when presented to outside, academic audiences. (Cameron et al., 1993, p. 92)

There is a common belief among some researchers that they have the right to do research in the name of higher learning bypassing the teachers' rights in their classrooms. Reality dictates that teachers put their reputations as educators at stake when research projects are carried out in their classrooms. Researchers should be sensitive to the teachers' rights in their own classrooms. After all, researchers are the ones being invited into the teachers' territory (Rounds, 1994). We are indebted to the teachers who invited us into their classrooms. We feel that researchers do not sufficiently acknowledge the value of teachers' cooperation.

All these issues bear importance in the data-gathering step of the research process. With relation to data-gathering, we were interested in collecting naturally-occurring data. Our data-gathering technique consisted of recording the children's verbal output during normal class sessions. We also gathered notebook data[19] following Beebe's model (1994). We did not elicit the

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[19] In our project, notebook data were data that we recorded on notebooks to accompany the recorded data—which came in handy, due to the fact that there were times when the recorders did not pick up activities that were going on in the class. Also, sometimes, the recorders were in the off position. In short, things can go wrong and this was a good back-up system (See Blanco-Iglesias in progress and Broner in progress).

data or give tests.[20] Once a week, we recorded the interactions of a group of children in two different classes as they went about their normal activities.

Last but not least despite all precautions we still had to deal with the issue of the Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972, p. 209)—that is to say how 'natural' would our naturally-occurring data be? The way we decided to minimize its effect was to allow the children to get used to our presence. We carried out observations inside the classroom under study during two and a half months before we chose our three participants in each classroom. By the time the actual taping process started we had literally—as mentioned earlier—become part of the back-ground. In any case, we were aware that our presence, or the presence of the microphone, probably had an impact. Nevertheless, we did not experience a change of behavior from the observation period to the taping period.[21]

Reporting on the Findings

The last issue we would like to comment on is data reporting. When a research project reaches its reporting phase, the gathering of the data has usually been long forgotten—especially in qualitative research where data gathering, transcription and analysis may take several years. As time goes by, it is easier to forget that the study will report on some aspect of the language behav-ior of the school community under study. At this point, more than at any other time, the role of ethical behavior must be taken into consideration. In the case of our research we believe that the best way to maintain the trust that the community has placed on us is to share our findings with the teachers and the children—when possible—at the same time the data are being analyzed. This will permit the researchers to know that when the report comes out, the people involved will have a good understanding of the results—that is, the results will not come as a shock. It will also allow the teachers, principal and students to comment on the validity of our analysis.

Part of this issue involves reporting to the school. Usually, principals and administrators alike ask for a written report of the results of classroom research. It is important to take into consideration that these reports may have more direct—positive or negative—implications for the school than any reports published in journals or books. In publications, names of subjects and locations of schools may be kept anonymous (AERA, 1992, p. 24) but in the report to the

[20] Researchers that will elicit data via questionnaires, tests, etc. which will require the children to do an extra activity should be aware that this may result in more difficulty in obtaining teachers', parents', and children's consents. 'No study should be allowed to consume class time unless it can be shown to be simultaneously of direct educational value to the students' (Tarone, 1980, p. 385).

[21] For instance, in the particular case of the fifth graders, the Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972, p. 209) would predict that the children would tend to speak more L2 (Spanish)—since they always spoke L2 to us and we always spoke L2 to them—rather than the L1 (English). According to preliminary data analysis (Broner in progress), this is not the case.

school, the school principal and school administrators will be able to relate particular results to specific people, programs or classes.

In our particular case, we have been very careful to point out to those involved that the research we are carrying out is not a critique of their curriculum and instruction but a description of what goes on in these classrooms with relation to first and second language use. We have also acknowledged that since we are carrying out a case study we do not claim that our findings are generalizable to the larger population (Nunan, 1992, p. 75). Furthermore, in our particular case all persons involved—administrators, teachers and students—are aware of the fact that both L1 and L2 are used at school. What we are proposing is a description of when, where, and how the shift from L1 to L2—and vice versa—occurs and to safeguard—to the best of our ability—the anonymity of the persons involved.

The point made here is that the researcher's responsibility does not stop at the end of the data gathering stage. We should always keep in mind that our use of the data will carry consequences that can affect people's lives (Soltis, 1990, p. 254). We feel strongly about this last point as many databases are used by secondary researchers once the initial data are reported. Here the danger of betrayal of the primary researcher's initial contract with the school community is always present. The primary investigators should be very clear with secondary researchers in monitoring the future use of any collected data. As the AERA (1992, p. 24) guidelines suggest, 'secondary researchers should respect and maintain the anonymity established by primary researchers.'

CONCLUSION

Despite the many steps involved in entering a school community to carry out a study, research in the area of second language acquisition in the classroom can and should be carried out. We feel research in this area will prove useful to both the advancement of the field and the continuing improvement of second-language programs in the schools. What we believe is needed is an honest open debate as to how to carry out this type of research in such a way that both the rights of the community and of the researcher are met.[22] The idea that permeates the literature is that these two forces are at odds. The common belief is that if we are more concerned about the rights of the school community under study than we are in the pursuit of truth, we will jeopardize research in the field. Our experience shows that this does not necessarily have to be the case.

We also acknowledge that despite good faith, things can (and do) go wrong in carrying out classroom-based research. Someone can always feel that his/her rights have been violated (Smith,

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[22] This call for debate is now being made by scholars from different fields (Cameron et al., 1993; Eisner & Peshkin, 1990, among others).

1990, p. 266). Despite potential errors we firmly believe that if researchers act in good faith, such errors can be minimized and those that nevertheless occur can be dealt with responsibly.

SOME TENTATIVE DO'S AND DON'TS

Our personal experience in carrying out classroom-based research has suggested the following do's and don'ts. This list is not intended to be exhaustive but we believe it is a good starting point for any first-time researcher interested in carrying out responsible and ethically sound research in the classroom.

- Treat the members of the school community as people (not objects): This is perhaps the most important piece of advice. Never lose sight of the fact that you are dealing with people—not chemical reactions in a laboratory.

- Talk: When pursuing an area of inquiry for the first time, always talk to as many people as you can who have previously carried out research in that area. Personal experience is the most valuable tool at your hand.

- Do not act alone: When possible, never attempt to make the first contact with an institution alone. Seek a referral from someone who already has a good working relationship with the school.

- Evaluate theory vs. reality: Acknowledge that the world as seen from the University is different from the world of the school. Be realistic as to what can be accomplished. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing that any university-generated research project is feasible and desirable in the school community.

- Be open: Tell the school community about your research questions and your research design. It is better to be rejected at the beginning than half way through the project.

- Be a diplomat: You are in a sense an ambassador for the University. If you prove to be successful in your contacts with the school community, you will open the doors to other research and/or researchers. Failing to be a diplomat may jeopardize future research (AERA, 1992, p. 23).

- Allow yourself room for change: Be willing to change your plan of action to accommodate the needs of the school community. Remember that they are doing you a favor.

- Check legal procedures: Every institution has legal procedures that need to be followed. It is your responsibility to find out which ones apply to your research in particular. Consider school procedures, school district procedures, university procedures. Written guidelines have been spelled out by TESOL, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Child development departments, and some school districts, among many others.

- Follow all bureaucratic steps: Don't take shortcuts. Despite the hassle that going through the right channels might require, it will pay off in the long run.

- Don't rush: In order to carry out sound classroom-based research you have to be willing to invest the time it will take to gain access to the community, build a trusting relationship with the community, follow all legal and bureaucratic procedures, get informed consent from the participants, gather the data, etc.

- Be generous: Always offer a copy of your results to the school; prepare a special report on results for the participants, and invite teachers to be co-researchers with you.

- Engage university colleagues in an ongoing methodology and ethics debate: We would like to end this discussion with a call for an open debate among researchers as to how to reconcile practicality and ethical behavior and the pursuit of truth when carrying out classroom-based research.

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