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Exploring prospective language teachers' constructions of 'discursive initiative': Generating hypotheses about their thinking

A B S T R A C T Teaching and learning in classrooms are discursively constructed in variations of the Initiation-Response-Feedback exchange pattern (Lee, 2007; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1991; Mehan, 1985; Sinclair & Brazil, 1982; McHoul, 1978). These discursive patterns and the content of the teacher's turns, we reason, represent indirect evidence of the teacher's thinking. At a more direct level, when we prompt prospective teachers to define the meanings they assign to key constructs in English Language Teaching, they articulate their consciously held understanding. Adopting a Kellyian perspective (Kelly, 1966/2003), one could argue that teacher training is supposed to be a trainer-facilitated experimental process in which prospective teachers, as active participants, define, diversify, adjust and evolve a set of dynamic constructs for dealing optimally with the processes of classroom teaching and learning. This article reports on such a constructivist approach in an applied linguistics course for education students in the higher education (HE) sector. Specifically, it records prospective teachers' constructions of discursive initiative in the language classroom. If we argue from the premise that the language educator's ultimate aim is to replicate authentic communication in learning experiences (Savignon, 2007:207-230), it is worth our while to explore prospective teachers' constructions of discursive initiative in classroom context. The data-collection procedure involved an eight-page self-reflective questionnaire, designed to elicit prospective teachers' personal constructions of various classroom-related concepts, including a 100-word outline of the concept "discursive initiative". We concluded that when learners (N = 30) are required to make sense of a classroom-related construct, they will invariably activate unique configurations of related meanings (consistent with Kelly's individuality and organisation corollaries). We also noticed shared meanings (i.e. Kelly's commonality corollary). We show that a constructs analysis of learner responses provides valuable information about learner frames of meaning which may serve as stepping stones to access preverbal construing, adopt a personalised approach to learning and raise learner awareness of classroom processes.

Keywords: language teacher education, construct psychology, organisation corollary, individuality corollary, commonality corollary

1. Introduction

It is probably an uncontroversial claim to suggest that prospective language teachers come to teacher education, not with a tabula rasa, but with a radar of often unacknowledged personalised meanings and constructs which form – or should form – the backdrop to their learning. Borg (2003:81) uses the term *teacher cognition* to refer to this "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching". In his review article, Freeman (2002:1) argues that "teachers' mental lives represent the hidden side of teaching," and that two socio-cognitive dimensions are relevant in teacher education:

> [o]ne involves the developmental question of how individuals learn to teach; the other involves the epistemological question of how teachers know what they know to do what they do (Freeman, 2002:1).

Given the wealth of research in this domain of teacher development (cf. Borg, 2003; Freeman, 2002; Woods, 1996), we locate this paper within this tradition, which derives from the undisputed premise that

> teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-orientated, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs (Borg, 2003:81).

Borg (2003:83) reviews the proliferation of terms in language teacher cognition research, pointing out that this "has led to 'definitional confusion' … [and] conceptual ambiguity". As a way of addressing these two concerns, we have opted for an approach to teacher thinking based on Kelly's personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955; Kelly, 1966/2003). As shown in Fransella (2003a) and Pope and Denicolo (2001), personal construct psychology offers a well-established framework, with its attendant terminology, to assign meaning to our experiences in whatever context. Apart from the obvious psychotherapeutic applications, Kelly's psychology has been used to make sense of individuals' meaning-making in a range of fields. These include not only teaching and learning (cf. Pope, 2003; Salmon, 2003), but also management (Cornelius, 2003; Brophy, 2003), nursing (Costigan, Ellis & Watkinson, 2003), policing (Porter, 2003), sports profiling (Savage, 2003), anger therapy (Cummins, 2003), cross-cultural construing (Scheer, 2003), forensic therapeutic work with sexual offenders (Horley, 2003), and artificial intelligence (Adams-Webber, 2003).

Language teachers, we reason, have an all-encompassing objective for their teaching practices: to develop learners' communicative ability optimally in the four skills in a range of contexts, roles and topics (Savignon, 2007:207-213; Larsen-Freeman, 2000:130; Richards & Rodgers, 1986:67-68). Thus, learners are often required to engage in discourse-level interactions replicating real-life communication (Berlinger, 2000:1-3; Kinginger, 1994:30). As Kinginger (1994:30) observes, "if conversation is 'the matrix for language acquisition', an important feature of classroom talk is the conversational initiative displayed by individual learners".

This is not where discursive initiative ends: learners are often required to display their discourse-based initiative when they engage in language-related episodes where classroom participants talk about language (Jackson, 2001:298-299). We therefore argue that there is a reciprocal

relationship between teachers' and learners' discursive initiative as a prerequisite for them to participate effectively in diverse floors for interactional learning (Jones & Thornborrow, 2004:399-423). These "floors for interactional learning", designed by the teacher, cover various kinds of discursive initiative required of participants to engage in both conversation-like interactions, and teacher-guided, awareness-raising language-related episodes.

The teacher is required to use her discursive initiative to design learning spaces and materials, as well as manage classroom learning so that her learners will be able to develop adequate communicative competence to meet real-life communicative demands, confidently displaying their discursive initiative outside the classroom. Learners, in turn, have to engage their discursive initiative in responding to a range of teacher initiations. Put differently, the kind of discursive initiative used by learners is contingent on the frameworks for responses created by teachers whose roles are defined as designers of learning spaces and materials that create conditions for learners to become involved in language-development experiences.[1]

Another focal point relates to how prospective teachers perceive the reciprocal impact of their own and learners' discursive initiative on contingent interaction in the classroom (cf. Lee, 2007:180-206; Van Lier, 1996:169-178), as discursively, they co-construct the learning process.[2]

It is common knowledge that teacher-learner interactions in classrooms are oriented to the endemic Initiation-Response-Feedback exchange pattern (cf. Lee, 2007:180-206; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1991; Mehan, 1985; McHoul, 1978). The nature of teacher initiations determines

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1 The term 'designing' refers to a conscious, critical-reflective and discursive process, initiated by a teacher who intends to co-construct, with learners, a learning space to achieve the goals of language learning. We agree with Weideman (2006, 2007) that the notion of applied linguistics as a discipline of informed, and socially responsible design should be explored. To develop reflexivity in classroom participants, we propose that the tools of personal construct psychology be used. The language educator's reflexive competence and continued growth require that she interrogate not only her constructs about the field, but also how her preverbal sensing about language teaching practices may be made more explicit. Indeed, if teaching practitioners view their involvement with learners as a reciprocal, and mutually-supportive, developmental alliance (cf. Brophy, Fransella & Reed, 2003: 337, who cite the term, first used by Hay, 1995, in the context of mentoring), they may begin to re-construe and transform their relationships. Teachers and learners alike have to view their own thinking as emergent and directed at change. It should be noted too that Kelly's framework may be used to deal with impermeable constructs, resistance to change, preverbal meanings assigned to the teaching act, inconsistencies in teacher thinking, cross-cultural construing, and many more.

2 The word 'constructions' is viewed in Kellyian terms: prospective teachers' personal accounts of 'discursive initiative'. These are their written accounts of the meanings they assign to the construct; these accounts do not refer to their actual ability to produce IRF exchanges, albeit that their constructs evolve on the basis of their knowledge and experience of specific classroom events. In the module, we focused on how the accuracy-fluency construct is constructed in two distinct IRF exchange types, linking theoretical constructs and their practical manifestations in the classroom. In this study, we focused on how learners perceived the notion of discursive initiative and their personalised accounts of such initiative, having been exposed to the discursive construction of such initiative in accuracy and fluency exchanges. Subjects' conceptual constructions of initiative belong to a different mode of experience than their discursive construction of initiative in real-life IRF exchanges, albeit that their experiences of classroom events serve as an anchor for generating their constructs-derived meanings.

how much discursive initiative learners are expected to take. For example, if we compare the initiations in (1a) and (1b) below, we notice that they create conditions for learners to display their "discursive initiative":

(1a) Right, class. Today we are going to explore describing words. In the sentence, "The clever pupil knew the answer," which word is your describing word?

(1b) Now, let us do the next exercise. In pairs, I would like you to discuss the following what-if statement: What if human beings had nerve endings in their hair? You have ten minutes to discuss and list these implications.

In (1a), the teacher has used an initiation which restricts learners' discursive initiative to a single utterance, if not a one-word answer, 'Clever, Miss'. In (1b), the teacher initiation requires a response which comprises learner-learner interaction, generated during a ten-minute period. It seems common sense to argue that the two teacher initiations represent a continuum of discursive initiative, with (1a) and (1b) the poles of the construct: a one-word answer at the one end of the continuum, and goal-directed, learner-learner interactions replicating real-time communication, at the other. As stated earlier, although the teacher may exploit meta-communicative accuracy teaching as pedagogical scaffolding (see Van Lier, 1996:chapter 7), his/her ultimate goal is to ensure that learners are able to use their discursive initiative in dealing effectively and efficiently with the demands of real-life communication in various contexts and roles (as in [1b] above).

The main aim of this paper is to explore prospective teachers' constructions of the notion 'discursive initiative'. To achieve this aim, we elicited prospective teachers' written accounts of the construct in a 100-word response. These accounts were analysed from the point of view of Kelly's personal construct psychology. We therefore place the study at the interface between intra-individual versus inter-individual meanings (cf. Block, 2003:74-81, 126, 131-132; Kinginger, 1997:243; Van Lier, 1996:190-196), a key distinction not only in language teaching, but also in education (Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978:57).

Methodology

2.1 Process description

The article reports on prospective teachers' constructions of discursive initiative at the end of a semester-long course on classroom discourse.[3] The process evolved as follows:

Step 1: A lecture-based introduction to constructs, constructive alternativism, how constructs are defined (as a conscious process) and Kelly's methodology for defining constructs

Step 2: A discourse-based construction of accuracy-based and fluency-based IRF exchanges

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[3] This 8-credit module is based on the author's article, 'Sinclair & Coulthard revisited: Global- and local-allocational turn-taking mechanisms in the language classroom', which appeared in Bouton, L. (ed.) (1995) *Pragmatics and Language Learning*, Monograph series volume 6. The article reports on how a discourse-based construct network was generated on the basis of theoretical sampling of discursive exchanges associated with accuracy and fluency. At the heart of the discourse-based network is the notion of learner initiative, which may be placed on a continuum of minimal versus optimal initiative.

Step 3: Student analyses of accuracy and fluency discourse
Step 4: Conversation analysis rules for accuracy and fluency exchanges
Step 5: Testing materials: testable predictions for accuracy and fluency exchanges, and using discursive evidence to validate or disconfirm the predictions
Step 6: Validating and disconfirming constructs and their predictions

Two continuous assessment tests were written, the one after step 3 and the next after step 6. Then, students wrote a summative test on all the material. An eight-page questionnaire was given to students to complete, with the task assigned 10/50 marks in the summative test. Of the 34 students registered for the course, 30 submitted detailed responses (N=30).

The questionnaire focused on various constructs: discursive initiative, hierarchies of constructs, learning spaces, perceptions of own and ideal skills, and personal judgements of usefulness. For the sake of length, we narrowed down the analysis to prospective teachers' personalised accounts of discursive initiative.

2.2 Key constructs from personal construct psychology[4]

We pay specific attention to Kelly's methodological procedure for defining constructs, as well as the following corollaries in Kelly's psychology: individuality, organisation and commonality.

Kelly (1955:15) states that we may define a construct when we focus on similarities and differences in our experience to arrive at polarities. This procedure is explained in the section on 'analysis of responses' below, and then illustrated in terms of a sample analysis in (1) to (4) under 'findings'.

The **individuality corollary** holds that 'persons differ from each other in their constructions of events' (Kelly, 1966/2003:9). This corollary reinforces the notion that each individual devises unique constructs for purposes of making sense of their world. Thus, when prospective teachers assign meaning to the notion 'initiative', one expects their discursive accounts to be unique. One of our aims is to show that the target population of subjects assigned personalised and unique meanings to the concept. The **organisation corollary**, Kelly (1966/2003:9) contends, implies that 'each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs'. This corollary suggests that individuals generate configurations or networks of constructs, integrated into relatively coherent wholes, which allow them to assign optimal meanings and make optimally relevant predictions in various contexts. Thus, when we analyse prospective teachers' accounts of the notion 'discursive initiative', we anticipate that we will encounter clusters of related constructs. Another aim of this study is to show that constructs do not occur in isolation; rather, they are configured within networks of superordinate and subordinate constructs. The **commonality corollary** refers to the shared elements that occur in different individuals' construct networks: 'To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to

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[4] Kelly's theory has a fundamental postulate and 11 corollaries. In this paper we focus on three of the corollaries, acknowledging that this account has been limited for the sake of space, and that the remaining 8 corollaries are equally useful in making sense of teachers' and learners' thinking and doing (Kelly, 1966/2003:3-20).

that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person' (Kelly, 1966/2003:13). In this study, we consider shared learner constructs in the midst of diversity and uniqueness in individual meaning-making, captured in a matrix analysis below.

2.3 The questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed, focusing on a number of topics we considered to be crucial in language teaching and learning. This paper focuses on one of the tasks and its elicited data. See dimension 1.

2.4 Elicited constructs

We used an open-ended elicitation technique, which required that learners record their discursive accounts of six dimensions of their experience:
Dimension 1: Constructions of the term 'discursive initiative'
Dimension 2: The teacher as a designer of learning spaces
Dimension 3: Linking constructs (hierarchies)
Dimension 4: Defining new constructs for the classroom
Dimension 5: Judging current and ideal own skills
Dimension 6: Student judgement of the meaningfulness of constructs

2.5 Elicitation technique

The elicitation technique was open-ended in the sense that subjects were required to provide their discursive accounts of each dimension. The entire questionnaire was couched in a conversational style, aimed at informing students of their performances and of interrogating some 'perplexing' issues which emerged from their responses.

> **Questions**: Read the module before you answer these questions. Give me your personal response to each question.
>
> **Dimension 1: Constructions of the term 'discursive initiative'**: I am often concerned about the notion 'discursive initiative'. In the article, we refer to 'initiative-maximising teacher initiations'. From the tests so far, I was able to deduce that students understand that the phrase refers to teacher initiations which allow learners to take initiative. What do you understand under this term as it applies to the discourse-based construct system presented in this course? Define the term in 100 words in the space below:

2.6 Case study and ethnographic methodology

In this study, we adopted case study methodology because the aim was, among others, to provide a descriptive account of each learner's active process of assigning unique meanings to various key constructs in English language teaching (Nunan, 1992:74-77). We also adopted principles from qualitative discourse-based methodology, which formed the basis for the analytical procedure outlined below (Nunan, 1992:52-58; Seliger & Shohamy, 1987:122):

Step-by-step cycle for conducting qualitative research

Step 1: Record all learner responses in an electronic data-base.

Step 2: Using Kelly's methodology to identify constructs, analyse all subjects' accounts of the construct 'initiative' as exhaustively as required.

Step 3: Record the analysed data in an electronic data-base for purposes of meeting the requirement that qualitative data should be retrievable.

Step 4:[1]

Step 4.1: Look for constructs in the data as evidence of uniqueness (i.e. following the individuality corollary).

Step 4.2: Look for hierarchies in subjects' constructions of discursive initiative (i.e. following the organisation corollary).

Step 4.3: Look for recurrent constructs in the data as evidence of shared, inter-subjective constructs (i.e. as evidence of the commonality corollary).

Step 5: Validate initial conclusions by returning to the data or collecting more data.

Step 6: If necessary, return to step 1 and repeat the cycle, redefining the area of focus on the basis of the first cycle

2.7 Analysis of responses

Analysing these responses, we employed Kelly's methodology for defining constructs. When we compare, say, three learning experiences, we may identify an aspect of difference. For example, we may construe the three experiences as follows: A and B focus on active learner participation, but these contrast to C which focuses on learners as passive receptacles of information. The aspect of difference is then **participative** versus **non-participative** learner roles. The three experiences, A, B and C, relate to **learner roles** (i.e. an aspect of similarity).[6]

Using a tabular format, we recorded the student's account of the construct in column 1. Each sentence in the account is marked in sequence as S1, S2, and the like (for sentence 1, sentence 2, and so forth). In the **constructs** column, we provide an outline of the researcher's account of the constructs (marked as C1, C2, etc) that are evident from the student's account. In the last column, the researcher provides critical-reflective comments, interpretations (marked as CA1, CA2, etc) and hypotheses (marked as H1, H2, etc) related to both columns 1 and 2.

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5 We felt we could add to or substitute any of the remaining corollaries as sub-steps to step 4, if required by the nature of the research questions posed in the project.

6 For more information about constructs, the reader is referred to Ravenette (1999:157-158), Fransella (1989) and Kelly (1955:chapter 3). For an account of the embeddedness of constructs in the totality of our experience in socio-cultural and other systems, we recommend Kalekin-Fishman (2003:143-152).

It has to be noted that the focus of the analysis involved both the subjects and the researcher. The first level of analysis was subject-centred, requiring learners to consider the notion of discursive initiative, and then provide a 100-word account. The second level was researcher-focused. The perspective developed here could, or preferably should, be followed up by eliciting prospective teachers' analyses of, and critical-reflective comments on, their accounts of the 'discursive initiative construct', as well as their interpretations, comments and hypotheses which, in the present study, are the researcher's, recorded in columns 2 and 3 of each table (See [5] below).

2.8 A matrix of constructs

In addition, to illustrate the individuality and commonality corollaries, we prepared a matrix of constructs for 5 subjects, randomly selected from the group of 30 students. The grid lists the subjects (marked as they were taken from the list) at the top of the matrix, and the constructs are listed in the left-most column, with tick marks indicating the distribution of these constructs for the five subjects.

3. Findings

In this section, we report the findings of the study. First, we quote a response from the data base to illustrate the analytical procedure for identifying constructs, and the organisation corollary (see Table 1 below). Next, we present the matrix of constructs (referred to earlier) to illustrate the unique meanings assigned to the construct (i.e. to show evidence of the individuality corollary) and shared meanings within groups (i.e. to show evidence of the commonality corollary).[7]

For example, we quote the first sentence of subject 2's definition of the concept 'discursive initiative':

(1) S1 from subject 2's account:

(S1) I understand that it [discursive initiative] means the teacher creates communication gaps for the learners so that they can communicate, interact, and learn to work in groups or just learn to interact with other people.

We could argue that subject 2 perceives herself, in pursuing discursive initiative, as a designer of learning spaces in which learners will be required to overcome communication gaps. These learning spaces, she states, will require that learners use language for a communicative purpose. The subject's unstated position is that learners will not be talking about language as they would in a language-related episode. Instead, she is explicit about learners having to use language as a vehicle for message-based interactions. We could therefore argue that these two contexts, the

[7] In this paper we do not focus on Kelly's fragmentation corollary (i.e. the inconsistencies in subjects' meaning-making). For example, the participating students seemed to confuse the idea of 'making a plan' and displaying language-related initiative in interactions. See (7.1) in the text. Nor do we focus on impermeable constructs which refer to those constructs teachers are unwilling to change. The construct **questioning** versus **passionate commitment** provides a framework for gaining an understanding of teachers' unwillingness to change (see Bannister, 2003; McWilliams, 2003). See also Mair (2003:405-414) on Kelly's constructs approach as a psychology of questions.

one articulated and the other not, constitute a polarity (i.e. an aspect of difference), namely **communicative** versus **meta-communicative** learner activity. Both contexts would require **learner activity** (i.e. the aspect of similarity). Thus, we would be able to postulate the following bipolar construct:

(2)

communicative (emergent pole)	versus	meta-communicative (dispreferred pole)
learner activity (aspect of similarity)		

Next, we could argue that subject 2 contrasts teacher-learner and learner-learner configurations of participants in the classroom – this meaning-making is related to the construct:

(3)

learner-learner (emergent pole)	versus	teacher-learner (dispreferred pole)
configurations of participants in the classroom (aspect of similarity)		

The subject associates the notion of discursive initiative with communicative learner activity within learner-learner configurations of participants in the classroom. We could reason that the learner should be sensitised to the fact that discursive initiative may also have other manifestations. When the teacher and the learners talk about language (in a meta-communicative sense), they are using discursive initiative of a different kind: they are using the discourse of meta-communicative, awareness-raising classroom talk. Although the latter discourse may not prepare the learner for communicative interactions in real-life situations, it may assist the learner in gaining a verbal hold on the grammatico-syntactic and pragmatic aspects of language (depending on the kind of task and topic). Perhaps an integration of the two poles of the construct may yield a more comprehensive view of the kinds of discursive initiative participants in the language classroom may use to engage in the learning process. Meta-communicative discussion in language-related episodes does not have to be restricted to grammatico-syntactic topics; in fact, such episodes may also raise learner awareness of the pragmatic dimensions of talk in goal-directed interactions. The complexity of this concept is evident from the work of Andrews (2006), Berry (2005) and Fortune (2005). The teacher's assumptions about the role of awareness-raising, meta-discursive input will determine whether or not she accords any importance to this dimension in her interactions with learners.

So we may develop the subject's thinking by linking these analyses as follows, showing that the superordinate construct of **discursive initiative** relates to two subordinate constructs, namely learner activity and configurations of participants in the classroom. This is what is meant by a hierarchy of constructs in terms of Kelly's organisation corollary:

(4)

Communication-directed	**Versus**	**Meta-communication-directed**
↓ **Discursive initiative (aspect of similarity)** ↓		
Communicative (emergent pole)	Versus	Meta-communicative (dispreferred pole)
↓ Learner activity (aspect of similarity) ↓		
Learner-learner (emergent pole)	Versus	Teacher-learner (dispreferred pole)
↓ Configurations of participants in the classroom (aspect of similarity) ↓		

In terms of this account, the subject views discursive initiative as communication-directed, involving communicative learner activity within learner-learner configurations of participants in the language classroom. Thus, we may refer to the articulated poles as emergent, while the unarticulated poles are preverbal, remaining inactivated and unarticulated in the account. Perhaps part of critical-reflective practice (i.e. reflexivity) is to look at constructs from the vantage point of both poles, as suggested by practitioners who use laddering as a constructs analysis technique (Fransella, 2003b; Bell, 2003; Cummins, 2003).

A suggestion is to use the student's account and the analysis in (4) as sources of hypotheses about her thinking. For example, she could be given the following hypothesis to explore: **Teachers have to be able to develop different kinds of discursive initiative**. She could then be given Andrews (2006), Berry (2005) and Fortune (2005) to interrogate the kinds of discursive initiatives needed by teachers to develop learners' meta-discursive awareness.

One is reminded that in an analysis of this kind, the reader is looking at the subject's meanings through the researcher's construct network. It is for this reason that we describe classroom processes of teaching and learning as co-constructed events. Moreover, the next stage of this approach would be for the researcher to design a learning space so that learners themselves may generate both the constructs (column 2) and the critical-reflective comments and hypotheses (column 3) [See (5) below]. In addition, Kelly's Repertory Grid Test may be used to describe subjects' individual psychological space, pertaining to discursive initiative, or any other learning- or teaching-related meaning-making (Fransella, Bell & Bannister, 2004). Denicolo (2003:123-132) and Denicolo and Pope (2001:chapter 5) outline a host of methods available in personal construct psychology to promote subject-directed and subject-generated accounts of their constructs.

Find on the next page subject 1's account of the discursive initiative construct, as well as the researcher's formulation of constructs, critical-reflective statements and hypotheses: (5)

The teacher trainer may use these person-specific constructs, statements and hypotheses as cues to the learner (prospective teacher) who should then interrogate her personal thinking, refine her meanings, and raise her awareness of how she assigns meanings to classroom events and experiences.

To illustrate the claims of the individuality corollary, we quote (6) below, where we made a random selection of five subjects' accounts of discursive initiative. We listed the constructs as we processed the subjects' formulations. Where verbal labels coincided, we made ticks in the same row. Where verbal labels were different, we entered a solitary tick in the row. We want to argue that solitary ticks emphasise the individuality of each response. These ticks reinforce the notion that individual uniqueness is evident in the formulations (in terms of Kelly's individuality corollary). Where more than one tick occurs in a row, this means that the subjects appeared to use the same construct to make sense of 'discursive initiative'. We quote the matrix of constructs directly on a following page: (6)

However, we want to note that even if the same verbal labels are used, this does not mean that these constructions coincide in an absolute sense. They may be shared labels, but subjects' accounts of what is meant by these labels may be different. Let us consider an example from

(5)

Student 1's account	**Researcher's formulation of constructs**	**Researcher's critical-reflective comments and hypotheses for further exploration:**
(S1) The teacher uses initiative-maximising initiations as this [concept] refers to fluency-based education. (S2) Here [in this context], the responses from the learners are not predictable. (S3) When the teacher does not know what to expect from the students, he has to be ready for anything. (S4) [If] he is not clear about answers, he can use questions or activities that the learners do or say. (S5) Now he must be able to facilitate and steer them towards the correct answer, without giving it to them directly. (S6) Every class will differ, and therefore, every time the teacher must use a different initiative to guide the students.	(C1) Initiative-maximising versus initiative-minimising teacher initiations (C2) Fluency-based versus accuracy-based language teaching (C3) Unpredictable versus predictable turn content of learner responses (C4) Teacher responsiveness to **unexpected** versus **expected** learner responses (C5) Question or activity-based teacher strategies versus other strategies to clarify answers. (C6) Direct versus indirect means of negotiating answers (C7) Uniqueness versus similarities between groups (C8) Teacher initiative matching versus not matching learners' uniqueness	(CA1) The formulation suggests that the student has mastered some elements of the 'discursive initiative' construct, as the subject links the concept to fluency and unpredictable turn content: (H1) Learners' discursive initiative has to be optimal to be able to engage in fluency-based interaction. (H2) Fluency-based interaction is associated with unpredictable, real-time communication. (H3) Learners' discursive initiative is therefore intimately linked to fluency teaching and unpredictable turn content. (CA2) The student refers to the teacher who has to be able to respond to real-life-like, unpredictable responses. (H4) The teacher has to have the risk-taking skills to set up fluency-based learning where he/she will encounter and have to respond to unpredictable learner responses. (H5) The teacher has to have the discourse competence to design appropriate learning spaces for language learning. (CA3) The emergent poles of the constructs function within a hierarchy of constructs. Configured under the fluency-pole of the accuracy-fluency construct, we find initiative-maximising teacher initiations, unpredictable turn content of learner responses, and teacher responsiveness to unexpected learner responses. (H6) A hierarchical relationship is found: fluency, initiative-maximising teacher initiations, unpredictable learner responses, and teacher responsiveness to learner responses of this kind. (CA4) If we consider S4 and S5, we might argue that the student focuses on the means available to the teacher to arrive at a mediated, yet participatory negotiating of answers. (H7) The teacher has to build in scaffolding in materials and interactional exchanges to mediate learning. (CA5) If we consider S6, we see that the student sees initiative as contingent on learner uniqueness. (H8) Learners' unique thinking will be captured in their productive output (i.e. writing and speaking). (H9) Learners' productive output may be seen as socially acceptable accounts of their thinking. (CA6) Discursive initiative is directly related to the teacher's ability to structure learner freedom to use language to achieve communicative goals, both in writing and speaking. (H10) Teachers' and learners' discursive initiative interact.

the matrix. The construct, **personalised** versus **non-personalised problem-solving**, has been ticked for subjects 8, 15 and 20. Let us consider the discursive evidence we used in arriving at the shared label:

(7.1)

(S1) For me, the term 'initiative' means that the teacher creates a plan, a technique to guide students through their learning experience and achieve success.

(6)

Constructs/Subjects	S 8	S 11	S 13	S 15	S 20
Planned versus unplanned teacher action to direct learning	✓				
Consciously selected versus subconsciously imitative choice of technique	✓				
Student initiative **contingent on** versus **not contingent on** teacher initiative	✓				
Student autonomy versus student dependency	✓		✓		
Personalised versus non-personalised problem-solving	✓			✓	✓
Using versus **not using** own skills and resources in solving problems	✓				
Students **making** versus **not making** a plan	✓				
Creative versus non-creative student responses	✓				
Independent versus dependent student responses	✓		✓		
Solving versus not solving problems	✓				
Participatory versus non-participatory teaching styles		✓			
Participatory versus non-participatory patterns of learning		✓			
Learner-constructed versus teacher-transferred answers		✓			
Delayed versus immediate teacher-initiated informative acts and correction		✓			
Efficient versus inefficient teaching and learning		✓			
Multi-participant interactional learning versus teacher-based transfer-of-information learning		✓			
Teacher-constructed interactional floors: **assigning** versus **not assigning** learner initiative			✓		
Maximising versus minimizing learner initiative			✓	✓	✓
Initiative as teacher-initiated classroom action versus initiative as learner-initiated classroom action			✓	✓	
Module-specific versus **extra-modular** responses				✓	
Critical versus uncritical thinking				✓	
OBE-consistent versus OBE-inconsistent teacher initiations					✓
Teacher-initiated versus other-initiated learner discourse manifested in responses					✓
Group-based versus class-based configurations of learning					✓
Teacher as monitor versus teacher as facilitator					✓

(S2) The teacher also has to use her/his initiative to motivate the student to use their initiative.

(S3) It is important for students to use their initiative so that they'll be able to work on their own and be able to be independent.

(S4) Initiative also means to solve problems by using one's own skills and knowledge.

(SA5) So, I will say that initiative is making a plan, being creative, being independent and to be able to solve problems.

(7.2)

(S1) I would define the term 'initiative' in terms of this course as follows: to use my own opinion, thinking and constructs in developing my own constructs to make sense of the module.

(S2) At first, I was not sure of the particular meaning of the word 'initiative' in the term 'initiative-maximising or initiative-minimising' [teacher initiations].

(S3) But, on further reading, and by attending the lectures, I began to understand that the teacher wants the learners to be able to either use their initiative or not, in responding to the teacher's initiations.

(S4) When learners use their own initiative, it means that they are thinking critically about the answer that they want to give, and the way in which learners want to present their answers to the teacher.

(7.3)

(S1) I think that initiative-maximising teacher initiations are a big part of the new outcomes-based education,

(S2) because the teacher gives the learners a chance to speak their minds in class.

(S3) The teacher initiates a certain discourse through giving them an exercise to complete.

(S4) She then explains the exercise to them.

(S5) They can then work in groups, for example, and then talk about their feelings and own experiences.

(S6) Through this the learners can maximise their learning experience by giving their own opinion.

(S7) The teacher plays a very small role in the discourse – she just keeps an eye on the learners, and gives advice if they need it.

We argue that the pole 'personalised learning' could contain the elements, 'one's own skills and knowledge' (7.1), 'my own opinion, thinking and constructs' (7.2) and 'to speak their minds in class' (7.3). The contrasting pole would be non-personalised learning where one's own skills and knowledge are irrelevant in the classroom, as would be one's opinions and one's expressing one's personal views. From the point of view of the commonality corollary, we argue that these three students regard personalised learning as intimately related to the discursive initiative they – or their learners – need to make sense of their experiences.

Although we were able to find evidence for the pole 'personalised learning' in the three students' accounts, we could also reason that these three instances may be constructed in other ways: how about (7.1) as 'personalised learning in the context of **the teacher engaging in problem-solving activity**', (7.2) as 'personalised learning in the context of the **prospective teacher's own opinion and thinking in making sense of the module**' and (7.3) as 'personalised learning in the context of the **teacher assigning learners the task to express their personal points of view in the classroom**'? Although we are able to identify elements that would support the emergent pole, 'personalised learning', we are also able to see that the focus of convenience for each instance is somewhat different. Moreover, each account is embedded within hierarchies

of meaning unique to each subject's discursive account, which reinforces the notion that constructs always occur within hierarchies of constructs, which in themselves are unique.

4. Conclusion

We have illustrated in this paper that learners' constructions of the notion 'discursive initiative' are unique configurations of meaning (as suggested by Kelly's individuality corollary). We also pointed out that in terms of the commonality corollary, learners may share elements of meaning when they construe the construct (i.e. the commonality corollary). We also showed that the discursive initiative (±) construct subsumes a range of subordinate constructs (as shown in 4, 5 and 6) above.

In the applied linguistic tradition of considering the implications of these findings for practitioners' practices in the classroom, we recommend specific activities and practices for language educators.

Pursuing individualised instruction: Teacher trainers may individualise their instruction by taking learners' unique constructions of meaning as a stepping stone into individualised instruction. Trainee teachers may be empowered to define their own constructs and reflect on the impact of these on their thinking and classroom practices. What are the practices that are typically associated with the poles of their constructs? The teacher trainer and/or the trainees may formulate hypotheses or speculative questions about their or other participants' constructs. Since constructs are (or should be) emergent meanings which are defined on the basis of teacher trainees' classroom experiences, they are not final. Prospective teachers have to be attuned to changing experiences in the classroom, consistently seeking (or devising) the most responsive and most functional meanings to make sense of their practices.

Suggested practices:

→ Teach prospective teachers to analyse their own accounts of classroom events and how these relate to constructs.

→ Mediate the process of identifying constructs in their written or spoken accounts. Later on, as they gain in competence, they are allowed freedom to engage in autonomous analyses and critical reflection of their own.

→ Ask for critical-reflective comments and hypotheses from these prospective teachers.

→ Interrogate prospective teachers' individual constructs and critical-reflective discourses.

Acknowledging the mediating role of unique teacher constructs generated in response to unique learner populations and unique context-dependent variables: Knowledge is constructed by teachers whose thinking and practices are unique; moreover, their thinking and practices are manifestations of their unique constructs. The uniqueness of these meanings is further promoted by unique contexts and unique learner populations (Freeman, 2002:11-12)

Suggested practices:
- → Use a scenario involving a unique context, population and problem. Then ask prospective teachers to write how they would respond to the scenario.
- → Prospective teachers analyse the constructs they have used to solve the problem-based scenario. They have to consider the context-specific constructs they have used.
- → They write out critical-reflective analyses and hypotheses for their responses.
- → In pairs or groups, they exchange ideas, including critical-reflective comments and hypotheses.
- → They change partners or groups to gain different perspectives.

Synchronising prospective teachers' thinking and practices in the classroom: The individual's constructs are shaped by his/her ability to allow new experiences to change the meanings and implications of the constructs. A recurrent theme to be considered is how specific classroom practices and role definitions relate to the poles of various constructs. An example of the kind of question to be asked is the following: If teachers want to promote the meta-language of awareness as they create appropriate interactional spaces, what are the classroom practices associated with such work? If conversational initiative is the benchmark of language acquisition, which techniques and approaches in language teaching would achieve this objective?

Suggested practices:
- → Prospective teachers specify which constructs they will want to explore during mandatory teaching practice.
- → Prospective teachers report back on the evidence they were able to collect to prove that they had pursued these constructs in their teaching, and were able to align their meaning-making and their classroom practices.
- → Prospective teachers report back on inconsistencies and counter-evidence. These have to be re-interpreted from the point of view of new constructs.

Raising prospective teachers' awareness and assisting them to access their preverbal (as yet unarticulated) constructs: Following the narrative psychologists, we contend that when the prospective teachers externalise meanings, they gain a handle on constructs, both those that are explicitly labelled in their world of experience, and those that still have an unarticulated and preverbal presence. Parry and Doan (1994:24) refer to narrative as a technique to gain a detached perspective and to raise the individual's awareness: '… [i]f narrative is truly fundamental to the way humans organise and give meaning to experience, it would probably be fair to say that an event only becomes an experience by being narrated'. Thus, analysing one's own account of a construct may allow one to develop a critical-reflective hold on the meanings configured around the construct. Making our preverbal construing conscious is seen

as part of awareness-raising activity – it is also a means of exploring unarticulated configurations of meaning. Like Crossley (2000:21, 61), we adopt the view that, in spite of constraints, the individual is free to pursue optimal meaning-making in response to the events of her experience.

Suggested practices:
- → Prospective teachers are required to write out their philosophy of teaching and learning. They then identify the constructs they have used to make sense of these processes.
- → Prospective teachers are required to list those constructs they were not consciously aware of at the start. They write brief accounts of the constructs and the practices associated with them.
- → They exchange analysis and critical-reflective comments. They re-vision their philosophies of teaching and learning.
- → They write a critical-reflective analysis of their new philosophy.

Constructs are not islands: The implication is that when students assign meaning to a construct, they invariably activate related constructs, often within hierarchical relationships (in terms of Kelly's organisation corollary). Much of the uniqueness of prospective teachers' meanings derives from the complex interrelationships among various poles of their constructs.

Suggested practices:
- → Prospective teachers are asked to write out 100-word accounts of three constructs, say, predictable versus unpredictable learner responses; contextualised versus decontextualised learning; and multiple-utterance learner-learner responses versus single-utterance learner responses.
- → They are required to identify the **additional constructs** they have activated in their accounts, and then re-write the account from the point of view of the preferred emergent poles of these constructs.
- → They write out hypotheses and predictions about their classroom practices on the basis of the poles of the constructs network.

Awareness-raising of fragmentation: This approach allows the teacher trainer to explore inconsistencies in a student's thinking (captured in written and other responses). For the sake of space, we could not explore the implications of Kelly's fragmentation corollary. See footnote 7.

Suggested practices:
- → Prospective teachers review any of their written responses for inconsistencies. They review and re-vision these meanings.

Bringing the research focus closer to the student: Although we may argue that the primary data were elicited from the students who completed the course, our interpretations and our analyses of the students' constructs are recorded here. In a follow-up, we intend to prompt subjects to identify their own constructs, as well as interrogate the implications of these constructs. In fact, learners should be assisted to explore the predictive efficiency of their constructs. Constructs may be viewed as configurations of meaning which allow us to anticipate the future. The predictive efficiency (or inefficiency) of prospective teachers' construct networks is a key dynamic in diversifying their constructs.

Adopting these practices and activities, we argue, the teacher trainer begins to supervise and facilitate learners' experiments and interrogation of their personal thinking and doing. Eventually, they may pursue these tasks as autonomous agents. So, the teacher trainer becomes a mediator-facilitator who applies the following constructs: **personalised** versus **non-personalised learning**; **scaffolded** versus **unscaffolded materials and experiences**; learner **dependency** versus **autonomy**; and **critical-reflective** versus **un-reflective learner experiences**, to name a few. The purpose is to deliver critical-reflective practitioners who will be able to pursue socially responsible and values-driven action as language educators.

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