SEEKING MATHEMATICS TEACHERS’ DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR OWN CLASSROOM PRACTICES.

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A problem arose during a study aiming to investigate affordances of professional, academic and regulatory discourses for mathematics teachers describing their own classroom practices. One aim was to seek each teacher's own choice of words so an approach was adopted to help the researcher avoid putting words into participants' mouths. As a result, the teachers' accounts were initially tentative, role relationships were negotiable and language choices took longer to make.

What challenges are there for researchers seeking mathematics teachers' accounts of their own classroom practices? How can relationships be established during the early stages of research without the researcher putting words into the teachers' mouths? Is it possible to elicit original and authentic accounts and what, if anything, might originality and authenticity mean in this context?

Initial fieldwork involved observing and videoing lessons and interviewing the teacher afterwards using the video as stimulus. Video aided recall was used to limit the need for the interviewer to introduce language in order to seek descriptions. This was important for the research to avoid inadvertently introducing discourses not chosen by the teacher.

I adopt a perspective on language as social semiotic (Halliday, 1978). The analytical framework of systemic functional linguistics seeing language as having ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions is useful. Paying attention to the ideational function offers insights into the agency of speakers in their constructions of experience. Paying attention to the interpersonal function offers insights into the relationships between participants in the interview (researcher and teacher). Paying attention to the textual function offers insights into how purpose emerges over time.

This research with mathematics teachers in London, England will be relevant for any subject teachers in any country where teachers have a range of discourses to navigate when articulating their practices in different situations with different people for different purposes. It was found that, at least for these teachers, notions of originality and authenticity in accounts of classroom practices must be expressed with nuance to be meaningful. The analysis reveals that accounts are contingent on institutional settings, relationships between participants and reflexively on language choices.