

# Instructional Sequences of English Language Teachers: An Attempt to Describe Them

**José Aldemar Álvarez**

Universidad de La Salle

joseaedu@yahoo.com

This article reports on the results of a study carried out at Universidad de la Salle which aimed to identify the instructional sequences of six teachers of the “Licenciatura en lengua castellana, inglés y francés”. Data were collected through observations, teachers’ logs and interviews. Findings show that teachers articulate their instructional sequences guided by stages such as practice, presentation, production, evaluation and homework check.

*Key words:* Didactics, instructional sequences, stages of a class, language teaching

Este artículo reporta los resultados de una investigación desarrollada en la Universidad de la Salle, la cual tuvo por objeto la identificación de las secuencias didácticas de seis docentes de la Licenciatura en Lengua Castellana, Inglés y Francés. Los datos se recolectaron mediante observaciones, fichas de clase y entrevistas. Los resultados evidencian que los docentes articulan sus secuencias instruccionales mediante las siguientes fases: práctica, presentación, producción, evaluación y revisión de tareas.

*Palabras clave:* Didáctica, secuencias instruccionales, fases de una clase, enseñanza de lenguas

## Introduction

The field of foreign language didactics or second language methodology has speedily developed during the XX century (Bastidas, 1993; Brown, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983). Nevertheless, it is a field which still lacks a great deal of exploration, especially in our country. A lot of theory about didactics has been produced so far, and countries such as ours have become eager consumers with little time to update prescribed teaching practices. The work done on didactics has centered mainly on school teaching practices, lessening relevance to what is happening at the university level (Mondragón, 2002). It is in this sense that the inquiry presented here gains momentum.

Knowledge about language methodology or didactics has centered on all actions, procedures, techniques and strategies that teachers can make use of in their pedagogical practices. Different methods and approaches have been proposed as ways to teach a foreign or second language (Bastidas, 1993; Brown, 2001; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983); all of them have prescribed or suggested instructional sequences that will allow teachers to comply with their tenets and achieve the established aims. Nowadays, in the post-method era (Bastidas, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2001) or post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), all principles and theories seem to have merged into an eclectic approach, giving birth to more personal applications. Consequently, instructional sequences have found new approximations.

The research experience I will refer to set out to achieve two different objectives: to identify the components of the instructional sequences and to define their structure in the English classes of a group of teachers. In what follows, we will describe the core concepts that will contribute to understanding the nature of the study, then the methodology will be discussed and the paper will end with findings and conclusions.

## **Core Concepts**

### ***Didactics***

The English tradition has not used the term didactics; instead the term methodology has achieved common ground (Bastidas, 1993; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983). By methodology, different authors have meant the area referred to as pedagogical practices (Brown, 2001) or everything that has to do with “how to teach” (Bastidas, 1993; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983). In the context of this paper, I will adopt the term didactics which I consider less limiting in order to understand the pedagogical transaction among the language classroom actors, the curriculum and a specific social, cultural and institutional milieu.

Didactics is a constituent but at the same time it constitutes the curriculum; according to Litwin (1997a, 1997b), it is a theory about the teaching practices which becomes meaningful on the basis of the socio-historical contexts in which they occur. Its main endeavor spins around the understanding and the description of the act of teaching and learning as a human activity. Additionally, “it purports to build its

knowledge based on reflection and dialogism among the axes that compose it and the agents that participate in the pedagogical practices.” (Álvarez, 2007, p. 13). The actual acting of teachers does not solely depend on their knowledge of how to carry out any specific task; there are some other axes (Estebaranz, 1994) which engage in interaction and dialog.

One first axe to understanding didactics implies the progress from the technical rationality towards a critical and hermeneutic approach (Grundy, 1987; Vez, 2001). Under this view, teaching is regarded as more than following pre-packaged sequences of procedures (top-down) but a sphere of human interaction where teachers’ actions and decisions are questioned, negotiated and become the product of reflection (bottom-up). Besides this, didactic theory is an emergent body of knowledge that updates day-to-day in teaching settings. The nature of the construction of knowledge within the discipline is the teaching activity and the internal dynamics to such process. In the same line of thought, the knowledge didactics produces is historical. The technological developments of the XXI century have brought about a new epoch for language learners, teachers and, of course, the knowledge that guides teaching-learning processes. This phenomenon links to a last issue, the interrelation between didactics and schooling. Didactic decisions are not only informed by cognitive or methodological sources, they should also reckon extracurricular phenomena related to social, political, economical or cultural dimensions. All in all, a class is not only a curricular event, but a social event as well (Prabhu, 1992).

### *Instructional Sequences*

In the field of foreign language didactics the term instructional sequences (Woodward, 2001) is not widely employed. Actually, there are several names to refer to the same concept: stages of teaching and learning (Dakin, 1980, parts of a class, (Chastain, 1988) and teaching sequence (Harmer, 2007). Perhaps the term has found concurrence in the name of procedure since there is some established literature about it (Bastidas, 1993; Harmer, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Stern, 1983). Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 31) defined it as “the actual moment-to-moment techniques, practices, and behaviors that operate in teaching a language...” Not far from this definition, some other authors describe an instructional sequence as the series of activities that teachers carry out during the development of a class session (Coll, 1991; Zabala Vidiella, 1997).

In general, methods (grammar translation method, direct method, audiolingualism, suggestopedia, etc.) as well as approaches (communicative language teaching, task-based approach, etc.) have proposed instructional sequences or procedures (Bastidas, 1993; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These sequences have generated some other amplified or reduced versions, as we will see in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Instructional Sequences Described by Different Authors

J. Dakin (1980) Stages of teaching and learning	Chastain K. (1988) Parts of a class	Nunan, (1999)	Willis, (1996) Task based approach	Gower, R., Phillips, D., & Walters, S. (1995).	Lewis & Hill (1993)	Doff, A. (1988)	Woodward (2001) Instructional sequences		Teaching sequence ESA Harmer (2007)
Presentation	Pre-view	Presentation	Pre-task Introduction to topic and task	Presentation Stage 1 Introduce structures	Introduction	Presentation	Teach	Pre-stage	E: Engage
Practice	View	Practice	Task-cycle Task Planning report Report	Practice Stage 2 practice model sentences	Presentation	Practice	Test	In-stage	S: Study
Development	Review	Production	Language focus Analysis and practice	Stage 3 Guided practice	Exploitation	Production	Teach	Post-stage	A: Activate
Testing				Stage 4 Freer practice using new context		Reading Listening Review			
				Stage 5 make a record of the form and uses of the structure					

Despite the different proposals, one can see that most of them maintain the same cognitive structure: show content in order to develop any further activity or action

that may lead to practice or reinforcement and, therefore, acquire any knowledge. The teaching strategy might vary, the input may be given in an inductive or deductive way (Cross, 1992); for instance, one can present or introduce a topic by prompting pupils to discover or by relying on a traditional topic display. Some others will use activation strategies (pre-stage, pre-view, pre-task or engage) in order to motivate or prepare students for reception of new content. Overall, the differences among instructional sequences originate from the teaching strategies and the intended linguistic content. Some sequences would attempt to enhance natural or less controlled interaction and language production (task-based approach, ESA), whereas some others would emphasize accuracy (PPP, parts of the class and others).

## **The Concept of Activity**

Like some terms in the field of language teaching, the concept of activity depicts inaccuracies due to the way it has been defined or the different terms that have been used to refer to it (Álvarez, 2007). In this regard, Brown (2001, p. 16) makes clear that “There is currently quite an intermingling of such terms as ‘technique’, ‘task’, ‘procedure’, ‘activity’, and ‘exercise’ often used in somewhat free variation across the profession.” After reviewing varied conceptualizations of the term, I have found useful Crookes’ formulation (2003, p. 144) for whom an activity is a segment of classroom life...intended to cover all distinguishable behavioral segments in a classroom”.

Unlike Brown’s definition (2001, p. 129), which asserts that an activity is “virtually everything students do in the classroom”, Crookes’ conceptualization (2003) allows for broadening the scope of the term since a segment of classroom life is produced by both teachers and students. Thus, the definition that we adopted approached activity as anything teachers and students do in a classroom. We added to this argument that teachers engage mainly in teaching activities (explaining, giving instructions) whereas students principally participate in learning activities (dialog practice, exercise completion).

Just as language methods have designed instructional sequences, they have also brought along a battery of activities as Bastidas (1993), Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (1986) explain. Clearly, the number of activities has diversified after the division of the language teaching curriculum into four skills which promoted the development of a wave of specialized literature to practice speaking, reading, writing or listening (Brown, 2001; Candlin, 1981; Chastain, 1988; Cross, 1992;

Harmer, 2007; Lee & VanPatten, 1995; Littlewood, 1981; Savignon, 1997). Activities are, therefore, basic elements for the constitution of instructional sequences.

## **Research Design**

### ***Population and Context***

The research took place at Universidad de la Salle in Bogotá, Colombia, during 2007. The participants were six teachers (4 female, 2 male) of the Licenciatura en lengua castellana, inglés y francés who volunteered to form part of the study. The teachers, whose ages were between 30 and 50 years old, were teaching courses in first, third and fifth semester. Most of them had been teaching for more than 10 years and had worked for different institutions like schools and other universities. All had done graduate studies, mainly courses for a master's.

The group of researchers that participated in the development of this study was integrated by a main researcher (the author of this document), a co-researcher and two assistants who did monograph work delving into one of the subjects of the project (see Gavilán, 2008).

### ***Type of Study***

From an epistemological perspective, this research intended to understand the scenarios, the teachers and their actions in relation to the instructional sequences. Direct insights coming from the participants and the data gathered were the main sources for understanding the phenomenon, as the qualitative research tradition points out (Merriam, 1998; Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Taylor & Bogdan, 1987).

### ***Data Collection Procedure and Analysis***

In order to gather information, three instruments were used: observations, teacher's logs and interviews. Non-participant or direct observations (Bonilla-Castro & Rodríguez, 2005; Pérez, 1994) were done by the researchers who visited 68 class sessions, that is to say, a total of 136 hours. The observations centered on making a thorough description of teachers' as well as students' actions or activities. The teacher's log was an instrument that allowed the participants to record in a chart, at the beginning or the end of every session, the activities, materials and objectives of

the class. The logs were intended to find out how teachers structured their classes in terms of their developmental sequences. Finally, a semi-structured interview (Bonilla-Castro & Rodríguez, 2005) was applied in order to ask the participants about the rationality behind their instructional decisions and choices. The interviews helped to delve into some of the aspects observed in class or the logs. They were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

In agreement with Taylor and Bogdan (1987), who state that data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous process, we followed three stages. In the first one, we intended to discover topics, patterns and to develop concepts at the same time that data were being collected. The second phase started immediately after the data were gathered. Here, there was a more detailed reading of all the information of each of the instruments; this was done in order to establish common patterns as proposed by Strauss and Corbin, 1990 and Strauss, 1987. The units of analysis were the teachers' actions and verbal elaborations registered in the instruments. Different classification schemes were designed by using numbers, letters and symbols (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Strauss, 1987). The third phase was the moment to categorize the different patterns found; the instruments were compared in order to triangulate the findings. Categories were then established based on the participants' voices about the structure of their classes.

## Findings

One of the tensions that we faced during the analysis of data was the naming of the sequence of participants' classroom actions. Nonetheless, informal talks with the teachers and the review of the observations and logs showed that a central element of their classes was the concept of activity. In view of this, it was concluded that by determining the different activities of the classes, we would identify their instructional sequence. To do this, it was necessary to survey the extensive literature about language activities for EFL. To our surprise there was a massive production about the topic: Group Work (Walcyn-Jones, 2000a; Walcyn-Jones, 2000b), Primary Activity Box (Nixon & Tomlinson, 2001), Move Up (Kay, 1997), Grammar Games and Activities 1 (Walcyn-Jones & Howard-Williams, 2001) and 2 (Howard-Williams, 2001), Writing Games (Hadfield, C. & Hadfield, J., 1990) and Reading Games (Hadfield, J. & Hadfield, C., 1995), Fun Class Activities 1 and 2 (Walcyn-Jones, 2000b, 2000c), Skyline: Resource Pack 2 (Banman & Cuder, 2002), among many others that made up the stock of books that provided activities for different

populations (young learners, adults, children) and for each one of the language skills (listening, reading, etc.).

A turning point that allowed us to move forward was the finding of a taxonomy of activities proposed by Crookes and Chaudron (1991) and updated by Brown in 2001. The taxonomy presented a comprehensive list of 38 global activities which were arranged on the basis of their pedagogical intention. The list was not adopted as a static framework; on the contrary, some of the descriptions or definitions of the activities were enriched and the list was enlarged to 39 as the product of the data examination.

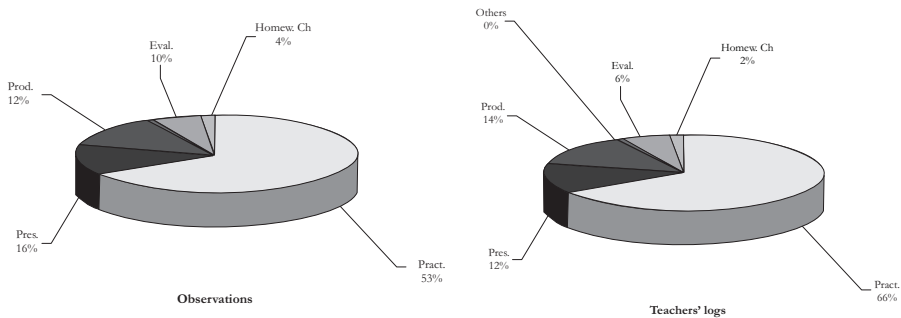
Although the identification of activities helped us name what teachers did, it did not lead us to identify an instructional sequence since it varied in every class. What was possible to identify through the activities, though, was the intention behind their use. The instruments and the conversations with teachers evidenced their affiliation with the structure of presenting, practicing and carrying out production activities. Activities were, then, developed in order to review, present, practice, produce or evaluate a specific content. With this in mind, the following task was to find out what activities were used by the teachers to achieve some of the instructional intentions mentioned above. This was not easy due to the fact that depending on the teachers' focus and actions, an activity could become a strategy to introduce, practice, review, etc. any content. Finally, we established that the classes were structured in blocks or stages which were comprised of several activities. Thus, the examination of the activities allowed us to find 5 components which determined the instructional sequences of the participants.

### **Instructional Sequences: Stages of a Class**

The classes of the participants were mainly organized around five big stages that emerged throughout class sessions: Presentation, Practice, Production, Homework Check and Evaluation. All these stages showed similar levels of frequency in both observations and teachers' logs (Figure 1)

The pie charts show that Practice is the stage that appears more during the development of classes. The observations evidence that this stage appears 53%, whereas teachers' logs report that it is used 66%. Both instruments agree on the fact that this stage presents the highest frequency of appearance. The Practice stage is the space to set up activities that involved the application, exercise or reproduction of the language item to be taught (Harmer, 2007):





**Figure 1.** Stages of the instructional sequence in observations and teachers' logs.

The teacher elicits responses from some student... They have to write expressions in past tense. ...She continues checking answers from the exercise with the whole class....she says: “past simple and past continuous, I want you to do the exercises.” (Flor, observation, March 5, 2007)

To apply grammar to produce oral information in questions... (Teacher's log, March 5, 2007)

To practice frequency expressions and questions about general information in a text. (Martha, observation, February 12, 2007)

These samples display the concept of practice as being central to the teachers since it was the best way to promote internalization of the contents under discussion. For instance, the first excerpt shows how the teacher Flor develops one activity that attempts to practice some verbal tenses. Notice the use of the word “exercises” which belongs to the semantic field of practicing. Similarly, she uses the word “apply” in the teacher's log which is also connected to the act of practicing. More explicitly, the participant Martha states that the objective of one of her activities for the day's lesson is to practice a language structure.

The second component of the instructional sequence is Presentation. The range of difference is low if both results are contrasted; while the observations depict 16% of frequency, teachers' logs account for 12%. This stage is “an opening stage in which the teacher makes the new language plain” (Woodward, 2001, p. 126), thus new content is introduced to students through direct explanation or demonstration inductively or deductively (Dakin, 1980). Margareth, during the interview, refers to this stage:

...because it's something traditional that you have to start with the presentation, with the explanation, and the internalization of those knowledges... (Personal communication, March 23, 2007)

Also references to this stage were found in the teachers' logs:

Activity	Objective	Material
2. <i>Introduction to the use of 's</i>	.. <i>they have to identify the use of 's to indicate possession</i>	<i>Board</i>

(Andrés, February 22, 2007)

Both as well as many other samples proved that the participants were inclined to incorporate a period of the class to formally present or introduce new language contents. Margareth relies on the tradition by asserting that it is customary to present a topic through an explanation. On the other hand, Andrés' log illustrates that there is the need to introduce a topic in order to facilitate students' identification of the content, in this case the Saxon possessive ('s).

Production is the third component of the instructional sequence. As with the previous components, there is no significant difference between the results of the observations (12%) and the teachers' logs (14%). Cross (1992), Dakin (1980), Harmer (2007), Nunan (1991), Ur (1996), and Woodward (2001) sustain that the stage of Production is the period of the class in which students are asked to use the stock of their linguistic knowledge creatively in less artificial situations or tasks. Let us draw upon the next example:

The teacher asks students to mention the pros and cons of virtual dating. He asks them to make two groups to discuss or list pros and cons. (María, Observation, February 15, 2007).

This is a discussion activity (Brown, 2001) in which students need to make use of their linguistic repertoire; therefore, they are not limited to simply putting into practice certain linguistic input that they have just received. Through this activity, knowledge of the world about virtual dating and students' experiences facilitate meaningful and more natural interaction and language production.

The fourth stage of the teacher's classes is Evaluation. The percentage in the observations is slightly higher (10%), in contrast to the teachers' logs with 8%. In the context of this study, an activity comprised part of the stage of Evaluation if the

teachers graded their students<sup>1</sup>. Most of the times, the teachers graded students' oral presentations, compositions, role plays or they gave quizzes or tests. Similar to the previous stages, this stage is dynamic in the sense that it may appear at any moment of the lesson and can be focused on different aspects such as a language skill (speaking, listening), a subcomponent of the language (grammar, vocabulary) or the students' attitude or behavior (participation, punctuality). This can be observed in the following excerpts:

The teacher asks students to arrange the seating and to be ready to take the quiz. They receive sheets and she suggests that they use a pencil... (María, Observation, February 19, 2007)

The teacher says "let's continue with the presentations, make a round table"...Diana says: "my biography is about Michael Jackson"...the teacher makes corrections on pronunciation and vocabulary...he gives a grade... (Johny, Observation, February 6, 2007)

It can be said that teachers are always measuring students' work from a qualitative perspective. However, it is normal to quantitatively evaluate students' performance as clearly pictured in the two samples. The first description represents the use of a formal evaluation procedure through a quiz about the latest topic taught. The second relates to a more informal type of evaluation or performance assessment (Genesee & Hamayan, 1994) such as an oral presentation.

Finally, we will approach the last element: Homework Check. Cross (1992) mentions that in general the main aim of this stage is to reactivate knowledge in order to aid assimilation and learning. The diverse literature that has dealt with the concept of instructional sequences (Chastain, 1988; Dakin, 1980; Doff, 1988; Gower, Phillips & Walters, 1995; Harmer, 2007; Lewis & Hill, 1993; Nunan, 1999; Willis, 1996 and Woodward, 2001) does not take into account this component; hence, despite its low representation, (4% for observations and 2 for logs), it was a recurrent element to some of the participants.

The criterion to consider this stage as a component of the instructional sequence was that it could be compared to the stages of Presentation, Practice, Production and Evaluation. We can see that these stages generated periods within the lessons that allowed the introduction, practice, reconstruction and recreation of the contents in

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1 We adopted this limited view of evaluation since it was the best way to record when the Evaluation stage was being used.

new ways; likewise, the stage of Homework Check created a space to revise how the contents treated in a lesson had been approached and explored in a different context out of the school setting. Therefore, the fact that the homework was done in a site different from the classroom, imposed some dynamics at the moment of its checking; for instance, the length of the time allotted to it, the interaction and the different activities that emerged during its revision. These features sustain the decision to consider Homework Check as another stage of a lesson.

In order to illustrate this stage, let us examine the next samples:

Activity	Objective	Material
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Homework Check</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>revise if students did it and the way it was done in order to correct mistakes</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Students' notes</i></li> </ul>

(Andrés, Teacher's log, February 2, 2007)

The teacher starts correcting the homework by asking each student about the questions that he had given them in a worksheet. She emphasizes the pronunciation of the apostrophe... (María, Observation, March 1, 2007).

These two samples confirm that this stage had some space in the teachers' lessons. Notice, for instance, that Andrés reported in his Log that his first activity would be the revision of students' assignment. By the same token, Maria started her class with the correction of homework. Based on this evidence, it is relevant to point out that in general, the Homework Check was done at the beginning of the lessons or at the end. It was oriented by different intentions, to wit: to set the context for students to practice any topic, to introduce or prepare for a forthcoming content, to reinforce knowledge or to promote autonomy, among others.

Thus far I have answered one of the inquiries of this research experience which centered on identifying the components of the instructional sequence. The scrutiny of the different instruments demonstrated that the structure of the participants' lessons favored five components: Presentation, Practice, Production, Evaluation and Homework Check. The prominence of some of these components over the others entails paramount conclusions which, for the time being, will not be addressed. Clearly, the discussion will become richer once the order of the structure of the instructional sequence is presented.

## Instructional Sequences: Is There a Sequence?

This section intends to account for the second objective of this study, related to the sequence of the stages of the teachers' lessons. Under the previous heading, we revealed the five components of the instructional sequence and talked about their rate of appearance, yet we did not establish the way these elements were lined up to articulate a sequence. Some background information would be necessary before tackling this issue.

As a manner to determine the order of each one of the components, we first identified the instructional sequence of each participant. The instrument that provided us with more relevant information was observation on account of the detail in which the teachers' lessons were described. Logs were another source, nonetheless sometimes teachers did not register in detail what they did or they omitted information. It is important to consider these outcomes with precaution because what is presented constitutes a general tendency of the sequence of every participant. The sequences came out of the comparison of the observations and were established on the basis of the regular appearance of the stages in each class. This implies that one stage might have been excluded from the general sequence, if its frequency was low. The sequence of each teacher was arranged in Table 2, as shown below:

**Table 2.** Instructional Sequence by Participant

Andrés	María	Flor	Margareth	Johny	Martha	General Sequence
Presentation/ Practice/ Production	Presentation	Homework Check	Practice	Practice	Warm up	Practice
Presentation	Presentation	Practice	Presentation	Presentation	Practice	Presentation
Practice	Presentation/ Practice/ Production	Production	Practice	Practice	Presentation	Practice
	Practice	Practice	Presentation	Presentation	Practice	
	Production	Presentation	Practice	Practice	Presentation	Presentation/ Practice

The table shows the instructional sequence of each teacher arranged by columns. The data indicated that sometimes the lesson of a teacher may start with different stages. This is the case of Andrés who usually started his class session with either a Presentation or Practice or Production stage. Similar variations can be observed in other participants' sequences (Maria, Margareth, Martha). Another aspect to bear in mind is the variation of the length of the sequences of the participants. The fact that some participants carried out 5, others 6 or even 8 stages suggests that some of them allotted more or less time to any of the stages. As described in the previous section, it was Presentation which received the highest percentage of appearance and Homework Check had the lowest. As a final point, the table depicts one stage of the class that was not discussed before. Participant Martha usually began her daily lesson with a Warm up. In English as a foreign language (EFL), this stage is employed to motivate and engage students at the beginning of the lesson (Brown, 2001). The consistency and relevance granted by Martha to this stage was strong enough to make it part of her instructional sequence.

After having established all participants' instructional sequences, it was our endeavor to draw a general sequence for the whole group of teachers. Following the same analytical procedure used to establish each teacher's sequence, we counted the number of times that every stage appeared in each of the rows of Table 2. For instance, it can be observed that in the first row Practice is mentioned three times, Presentation two, Production one, Homework Check one and Warm up one. This, in turn, led us to conclude that the Practice stage would constitute the first element of the general sequence. Thus, the next components of the general sequence were the following: Presentation, Practice, Presentation, Practice, and Presentation/Evaluation (both presented the same frequency of appearance). Indeed the result of the general sequence will have to be viewed with caution because of the level of generalization assumed. Nevertheless, by looking at the teachers' individual instructional sequence, one may conclude that on the whole, the general sequence keeps the same tendency of the teachers' lessons. More in this regard will be said in the last section of this paper.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

Two issues will be discussed under this title: the definition and dynamics of the instructional sequence and the order of its components. In addressing the first issue, I will make the argument that they are not the teachers' instructional sequences but the instructional sequences of the lessons of the teachers. The observation and the direct

contact with the participants prompted us to restate the concept of instructional sequence that we had adopted. Although the literature on the subject seemed to infer that it belongs to the sphere of action of the teachers who manage it and build it (Coll 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Woodward, 2001; Zabala Vidiella, 1997), it was concluded that it is not a monological construction instilled by one of the pedagogical actors (the teacher); on the contrary, it is the product of the emergent pedagogical situations during lessons and the interaction among students, teachers and their social and cultural background (Álvarez, 2007; Edge, 1996; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1992).

The last contention, in turn, suggests that instructional sequences are dynamic and that as Doff (1988) asserts, they overlap, they may happen in different orders or their appearance may fluctuate. In part, they depend on the interaction of the different elements that takes place in the teaching activity. This explains to some extent the difficulty to establish concrete and stable, common patterns of the instructional sequence. Put differently, there is a significant level of indetermination regarding the actions and situations that happen in class. Clarke (1994) reports that a study of the instructional methods of 39 teachers demonstrated that the rate of variation owed to class dynamics makes difficult the characterization of what teachers do. However, the fact that researchers cannot prove structured and fixed phenomena related to teaching and learning processes should not disregard the need to carry out research on the didactics of language teaching.

Now let us approach the second topic of discussion: the order of the components of the instructional sequence. The focus will basically be the main three components: Practice, Presentation and Production. The outcomes of this study pinpoint two differences from the traditional proposals about the instructional sequence. The first one has to do with the addition of two more elements to the triple P paradigm: Homework Check and Evaluation. This addition enriches the tripartite model and to some extent complements it since it does not account for these two elements that are part of the dynamics of a class.

On the other hand, the instructional sequence identified breaks the conventional order of the triple P model: Presentation, Practice and Production. The change of order entails some implications. The position of Practice as the first stage of the instructional sequences was backed up by the rate of frequency in two of the main instruments: teachers' log with 66% and observations with 53%. The teachers seemed to have adopted the popular aphorism that through practice, something can

be learned. The concept of practice is related to the act of repeating and modeling; in other words, there are behavioral principles behind it. Although this has been criticized as an inherent feature of the triple P model (Harmer, 2007; Nunan, 1991), some authors like Vez (2001) cite experts such as Gagné, Faerch and Kasper who agree that imitation and repetition are some of the basic processes to build linguistic habits and, consequently, acquire a language. Nevertheless, Vez adds that repetition would be suitable during the first learning periods but students should be taken to further periods where they have the chance to develop linguistic autonomy.

The prominence of Practice over Presentation is related to an inductive view of teaching. The data showed that the participants usually set up activities which implied the practice of any topic but implicitly introduced new language contents. Students were encouraged to develop linguistic intuition and generate meaningful contexts where learning, in part, departed from their questions, hypotheses and language needs. In light of this, teachers integrated behavioral principles which required the modeling of certain linguistic behaviors, but they also favored meaningful learning through discovery.

The inductive introduction to contents (Cross, 1992) was not the only way to address a topic. Teachers also made use of traditional formal explanation or demonstration. In fact, most of the teachers sustained that they only relied on long and extended presentations of content when it was strictly necessary. This perspective entailed a new role for teachers. The classes were more student-centered and teachers played the role of monitors or counselors. Likewise, students were compelled to assume a central role concerning interaction among themselves and the teacher.

Last, but not least, we find the Production stage. As expressed above, this is the moment of a lesson in which language is used in a free, interactive and creative way, allowing the user to utilize his/her life experience and linguistic knowledge (Cross, 1992; Dakin, 1980; Doff, 1988; Lewis & Hill, 1993; Nunan, 1991; Nunan, 1999; Ur, 1996; Woodward, 2001). This stage showed a low frequency of appearance both in observations and teachers' logs, with 12% and 14%, respectively. We are impelled to the conclusion that, as Savignon (1997) and Widdowson (cited in Savignon, 1997) suggest, the high rate of Practice compared to the low inclusion of Production stages has a negative impact on the development of communicative competence or communicative ability.

The emphasis on the Practice stage seems to point out at that the participants of this study are more concerned with guaranteeing the cognitive acquisition of certain



linguistic elements. However, as argued by Widdowson (1978, as cited in Savignon, 1997) there is the risk of reducing language development to the search of linguistic competence at the expense of the achievement of communicative competence. The same author highlights that the overemphasis on activities and exercises of repetition for production and reception of sentences is likely to inhibit the development of communicative competence. The importance granted to stages of Practice and the reduced time allotted to the Production stage should be a matter of reflection then.

This report has addressed two elements of the rich palette of inquiry that emerge from the teaching activity in EFL: the instructional sequence and the components that structure it. The results presented constitute one particular approach toward understanding how teachers organize their teaching and how classroom dynamics generate pedagogical interactions. Surely more research and interpretative frameworks will enrich the findings displayed here; indeed, at the university level, the area of didactics is in need of a research agenda (Mondragón, 2002). This is especially true for universities that are educating the prospective foreign language teachers in our country. New generations of teachers are facing different populations for which they are not prepared. As a result, researchers on didactics in universities need to start providing links between the didactics new populations are asking for and the teaching on didactics that is being offered to pre-service teachers.

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## The Author

**José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia** holds a Master in Applied Linguistics to TEFL and a Master in Hispanic Linguistics from Instituto Caro y Cuervo. He is a full time

José Aldemar Álvarez

professor in the School of Languages at Universidad de La Salle and works part time at Universidad Nacional in Bogotá. He has lectured and published several articles about educational and linguistics issues for various academic forums. He is an active member of the Board of Directors of the Asociación Colombiana de Profesores de Inglés (ASOCOPI).