Chapter 3
Dealing With Unexpected Situations in the Classroom:
Evidence From Multimodal Narratives of Teaching Practices

Ana Edite Cunha
Escola Secundária S. Pedro de Vila Real, Portugal

Cristina Marques
Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Portugal

ABSTRACT
This chapter examines teachers’ practices in dealing with unexpected situations (USs) in the classroom and students’ reactions to these practices. This study analyzes the multimodal narratives (MNs) of the classes of five teachers: three from basic education and two from higher education. The results show that the teachers identified USs and most of the time acted in a way to solve the problem by interacting with their students. This interaction took a variety of forms. The students reacted to these teachers’ practices in different ways: clarifying their ideas and concepts, establishing links between ideas and/or concepts, answering or taking the initiative autonomously, correctly performing a task or solving a problem, and/or becoming more involved/active in their learning. In cases in which teachers did not act on the US, the students did not understand the task or took a passive attitude toward learning.

INTRODUCTION
This chapter presents an analysis of the performance of the classes of five teachers, three in basic education (students’ ages from 13 to 15 years) and two in higher education, focusing on the decisions of the teachers when facing unexpected situations in the classroom and on the students’ reactions to these decisions, in terms of learning.

The authors begin by presenting the reasoning of this study in terms of the classroom real-time decision making of teachers. The relevance of knowing and understanding teachers’ decisions is discussed.

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to improve their pedagogical practice, especially when decisions are made when facing unexpected situations that occur in the classroom. It is argued that decisions must be taken after critical and systematic reflection on the students’ thinking, their execution of tasks, and their learning, as well as the teaching practice. Although there is evidence that teachers and their actions condition the quality of students’ learning, the characteristics of teachers’ practices that determine improvements in teaching and learning are still unknown. Emphasis is placed on the relevance of teachers’ data collection about their teaching and students’ learning, so it can be analyzed, reflected on, and interpreted as a way of taking informed decisions, adapted to the reality of each classroom and of each student.

This study intends to identify the characteristics of teachers’ decision making in face of unexpected situations in the classroom that contribute to improving students’ learning.

BACKGROUND

The quality of the professional performance of teachers has been a concern among teachers themselves and investigators for a long time (e.g., Bishop, 1976; Datnow & Hubbard, 2016). In addition to the continuous updating of the knowledge to be taught, being a teacher requires constant adaptation to the classroom reality (Cunha, 2015; Santos, Lopes, & Cravino, 2011; Saraiva, Lopes, Cravino, & Santos, 2012). In their pedagogical practice, teachers have to be involved in a very complex process, which includes decision making (Lloyd, 2017). Teachers are often confronted with unexpected situations that occur in the classroom, that is, situations that they did not expect to happen, having to react and make decisions (Aho, Haverinen, Juuso, Laukka, & Sutinen, 2010; Bishop, 1976; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). That is, while teaching, teachers follow their “mental script,” a process that is interrupted when unexpected events arise in the classroom. This stopping forces teachers to redirect their focus of attention and react to the new situation (Shavelson & Stern, 1981). According to Bishop (1976), taking decisions is a central activity of the teaching process, because the teacher has to know what to do, and how to do it, in the face of unforeseen situations that occur in the classroom. For example, when students do not understand or do not answer a question, when there are students who want to respond and others who do not, or when students make a mistake, the teacher has to make a decision, given a range of choices (Bishop, 1976). For this researcher, knowing how teachers make their decisions allows an understanding of the objectives and intentions of their teaching and the attitudes and scientific development of the students, making it possible to establish relationships between teaching theories and classroom reality. Borko, Roberts, and Shavelson (2008), after analyzing studies about classroom decision making, concluded that it emerged as a response to students’ comments, incorrect responses or performance, lack of understanding, or even unruly behavior. Faced with these situations, teachers react in time, making teaching decisions such as questioning students, selecting students to respond, or giving appropriate examples. Understanding how decisions are made can help to improve the practice of decision making (Patel, Kaufman, & Arocha, 2002) and consequently make teaching more effective (Schoenfeld, 2015). That is, the articulation between thought and action that occurs during decision making facilitates better-quality learning (Lloyd, 2017).

However, it is not yet clear how knowledge about the desired practice is linked to the actual practice (Borko et al., 2008). Lloyd (2017) argued that critical reflection on their teaching practice helps teachers