

# Dick Allwright

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**Lancaster University, UK**

## **Plenary Speaker**

Dick Allwright is one of the most influential applied linguists in the field. His main areas of interest bridge theoretical and practical concerns in the area of language education. An early enthusiast for observational classroom research, Dr. Allwright is more recently the originator of the innovative and increasingly influential pedagogical movement called Exploratory Practice (EP). His work has always been closely connected to the actual language classroom and has probed the intricacies of interaction, relationships of control, and the interface between teaching and learning. Dr. Allwright is former Chair in Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University. Dr. Allwright's publications include: *The Developing Language Learner: An Introduction to Exploratory Practice* (2009; with Judith Hanks); *Focus on the Language Classroom* (1991; with Kathleen Bailey); and *Observation in the Language Classroom* (1988).

## **About the Presentation**

### ***Theorising “Down” Instead of “Up”: The Special Contribution of Exploratory Practice***

Taking Exploratory Practice work in Brazil as my starting point, I will argue that we need to look again at the awkward relationship between theory and practice. Science typically works by theorising upwards, by abstracting away from the messiness of real-world “practice” to reach a higher realm where a “theory” can help us understand that world. In principle, we can then use our theoretical understandings to cope better with the real world. Unfortunately, abstracting far away from the world makes using your theory back in that real world highly problematic, because you now have to deal with all the complexities that the theorising was getting away from. Theorising downwards, instead, can be a practical, and highly productive, alternative. “Theorising downwards” means accepting the bewildering complexities of life and digging down into them to try to find a way of developing understandings that will help us live more productively. Exploratory Practice is a form of practitioner research that does just that. It can also bring teachers and learners together in their search for understandings that may be “too deep for words” but that will nevertheless help them get more out of their lives together as practitioners of teaching and learning.