Exploring teacher beliefs and classroom practices through reflective practice: A case study

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Abstract
This article presents a case study that explored and reflected on the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of one second language reading teacher. The findings of this study revealed that this particular teacher holds complex beliefs about teaching reading that were evident to some extent in many of his classroom practices. Additionally, this study found that by articulating and reflecting on his beliefs, the teacher became more aware of the meaning and impact of these beliefs on his classroom practices. Findings from this study correlate with findings from previous studies in first language (L1) reading research that examined the relationship between teacher beliefs and classroom practices. Implications for future research are also discussed.

Keywords
Reflective practice, teacher beliefs, teacher development

I Introduction

There is increasing research evidence in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) that language teachers hold complex beliefs about teaching and learning, and that these beliefs have a strong impact on classroom practices (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Kuzborska, 2011). As Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, and

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Thwaite (2001) have observed, it is these beliefs that 'influence how the teacher orchestrates the interaction between learner, teacher, and subject matter in a particular classroom context with particular resources' (p. 473). However, just how much influence teacher beliefs have on actual classroom practices has recently come into question with some studies reporting a strong relationship between teacher beliefs and practices (e.g. Kuzborska, 2011), with other studies reporting a more limited correspondence between beliefs and practices (e.g. Farrell & Lim, 2005). Because teacher beliefs are, as Kagan (1992, p. 65) has noted, 'Unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught', they must be brought to the level of conscious awareness. One way of accomplishing this is to encourage language teachers to articulate their beliefs to themselves and others (Farrell, 2008), and to use these articulations as 'a meaningful basis for discussion and reflection on planned aspects of practice' (Basturkmen, 2012, p. 291). In other words, teachers should consciously consider their beliefs by reflecting-on-action, reflecting-in-action and reflecting-for-action (Farrell, 2013a, 2013b). The research reported on in this article is one attempt at encouraging such reflection. The purpose of the article is to explore the relationship between the beliefs and classroom practices of one novice English as a second language (ESL) teacher of second language reading (L2 reading).

II   Reflecting on practice

Reflecting on practice generally means teachers thinking about their underlying values and beliefs about teaching and learning and comparing these to classroom practices (Farrell, 2008). In order to engage in this type of reflection, teachers must systematically collect information (data) about their classroom practices, and then examine if there are any inconsistencies between their beliefs and practices (Farrell, 2008). Engaging in such evidence-based reflective practice enables teachers to articulate to themselves (and others) what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and, ultimately, what the impact of one's teaching is on student learning. The results of engaging in such data-driven reflective practice may mean an affirmation of current practices or the need to make changes to current practices because they may not reflect a teacher's particular beliefs. Ultimately, any changes in practices a teacher makes will be the result of concrete evidence rather than based on impulses or routine.

Reflective practice thus enables teachers to realize the influence of their beliefs on the instructional decisions they make while teaching. As Borg (2003) has maintained, 'teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs' (p. 81). Nevertheless, not all language teachers are aware of their beliefs or to what extent their beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices (Farrell, 2008). Senior (2006) has observed that many teachers 'do not have the inclination to sit down and reflect on the reasons that underlie their classroom decision making' (p. 247). Developing such awareness is important as Knezedivc (2001) has pointed out, because it is the beginning of a 'process of reducing the discrepancy between what we do and what we think we do' (p. 10).

To date not much research has been conducted on the beliefs and practices of teachers of second language reading. In some early work on beliefs and practices related to teaching literacy to ESL students, Johnson (1992) discovered that there was a strong relationship between novice ESL teachers' theoretical orientation and their literacy instruction. In a more recent study related to beliefs and practices of English for academic purposes (EAP) reading teachers, Kuzborska (2011) discovered that there was a strong relationship between the EAP teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices. However, we still do not know much about how beliefs influence practices and vice versa associated with teaching second language (L2) reading. The research reported on in this article is one attempt to add to the literature by reflecting on the beliefs and classroom practices of one novice ESL teacher in Canada when teaching L2 reading classes.

III Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted in the form of a case study in order to examine the relationship between teacher beliefs and observed classroom practices with regard to second language reading (Bogden & Bilken, 1982). The study utilized a case study method (Merriam, 1988, 2001) that was exploratory and descriptive in nature to arrive at basic information (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). The use of case study methodology was chosen because it best facilitates the construction of detailed, in-depth understanding of what is to be studied, and because case study research can engage with the complexity of real-life events (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Other TESOL scholars have successfully utilized similar case study methods for similar types of research (e.g. Clair, 1998; Farrell, 2008; Tsui, 2003).

1 The participant

Dantes (a pseudonym), a novice male ESL teacher in a university language school in Canada, has a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Applied Linguistics and at the time of the study had just completed his first two years as an ESL teacher in a university EAP program. Dantes informed the researchers that he was interested in his own professional development and was particularly interested in exploring his beliefs and practices about teaching reading, and he asked the researchers to help facilitate this exploration.

2 Context

During the period of the study, Dantes was teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) at a university language school designed to prepare L2 learners for entrance to university. The students had five one-hour classes per day and each class focused on one language skill (listening, reading, writing, speaking, and grammar). Dantes was teaching a high-beginner level L2 reading class that consisted of 20 ESL students. The school assigned reading textbook was Dantes' only source of materials.

3   Data collection

In addition to the paucity of research on the beliefs and practices of L2 reading teachers, many studies on teacher beliefs and practices in other skill areas and in general education have mainly used questionnaires and interviews to obtain data (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001), but very few studies have combined these with classroom observations to explore what teachers practice in their classrooms (Kuzborska, 2011). Using classroom observations allows for a firsthand account of what happens in a classroom – from the observers' perspective and evidence (data) – rather than what teachers think happens (Merriam, 2001). Therefore, the case study presented in this article not only attempts to fill in the gap in the literature on the beliefs and practices of L2 reading teachers, but is also notable in that it uses several sources of data collection to obtain evidence: interviews, classroom observations, and journal writings.

Data was collected over a four-week period. The sources of data used for this study included: one pre-study interview, six one-hour classroom observations with 15–20-minute pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews, along with a follow-up interview one week after the last observation. A final interview was also conducted two months after the period of the study in order to get Dantes' reaction to the findings. Additionally, throughout the process, Dantes volunteered to keep a teaching journal where he could express his thoughts about the classes observed and whatever else he wanted to write about during the period of the study. All the interviews and classroom observations were recorded and later transcribed.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow Dantes space to express his beliefs. First, an initial interview was conducted in order to gain insights on Dantes' beliefs about teaching in general as well as teaching L2 reading. The beliefs stated in this initial interview would be used as the starting point for making comparisons across the different methods of research used. The pre-observation interviews were conducted three hours before the class began and were recorded. The questions related to what Dantes had planned to do in the class for that day. The post-observation interviews were conducted one hour after the class took place, and questions in those interviews were mainly about what had happened in that class. The final interview was conducted one week after the final observation. This final interview revisited questions from the initial interview (i.e. what are his beliefs about teaching and beliefs about teaching reading), along with new questions that were designed to further explore various aspects of teaching and thus allow for further beliefs to surface. We also conducted a follow-up interview after the data had been analysed and written up for Dantes' reactions and comments. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Six one-hour classroom observations were conducted in Dantes' classroom. During the classroom observations, the observer sat at the back of the room, where she would not disrupt the students. A tape recorder was used to record the classes observed. The observer took notes to describe Dantes' actions during the classes. The classroom observations formed the basis for discussion with Dantes after each observed class about what he did and why. All classroom observations were recorded and transcribed.

In addition to the interviews and classroom observations, Dantes volunteered to write a teaching journal to reflect on each of the classes that were observed and anything

further he wished to write about during the course of the study. Since the journals were to represent his personal reflections, Dantes was given free range as to how he would like to format the journals as well as how much he would like to write.

4 Data analysis

The case study sought to answer the following four main research questions:

1. What are Dantes' professed beliefs about teaching L2 reading?
2. What are Dantes' classroom practices?
3. What is the relationship between Dantes' professed beliefs and classroom practices?
4. How does reflection facilitate Dantes' exploration of his beliefs and practices?

These research questions guided the collection and analysis of data. When all of the observations and interviews were transcribed, they, along with the journal writings were coded and analysed. In order to ensure the data were reliable, all of the transcripts were coded and analysed on four separate occasions by the researchers in order to ensure that the codes were consistently identified (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Once it was concluded that all of the categories were concrete, they were compared with the other types of data (classroom observation notes and journal writings) to investigate similarities. This data triangulation was used as a strategy to increase the validity of evaluation and research findings (Mathison, 1988). Before terminating data analysis, various member checks were performed whenever possible to elicit feedback from the teacher (Dantes) on the appropriateness of the analysis and interpretations presented in the findings below, and we added his comments and reflections on these findings as a means of further validating the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

IV Findings

We now present the findings as answers to the four research questions.

1 What are Dantes' professed beliefs about teaching L2 reading?

This section reports on Dantes' professed beliefs. Table 1 outlines his professed beliefs as expressed during the pre-study interview. These professed beliefs were organized into three themes: language teaching in general, teaching L2 reading, and language learning.

First, Dantes stated that an ESL teacher should help students develop their general language abilities. With regards to the language classroom, Dantes said that teachers need to make lessons interesting; he noted: 'I try to pick topics that I think the students find interesting.' However, he said that he also finds this aspect of his work challenging; he continued: 'but how do you make it interesting for them? So sometimes that's a challenge for me as well.' In relation to general methods of language teaching, Dantes stated that he usually uses pair work or group work in language classes whenever possible; he

Table 1. Dantes' beliefs.

Theme	Belief
Language teaching	• help students develop language abilities; • help students develop skills necessary for their learning purposes; • choose topics that students will find interesting; • importance of pair and group work; • develop students' critical thinking skills.
Teaching L2 reading	• a teacher helps students develop reading skills and strategies; • promotes skimming and scanning as L2 reading strategies; • activates students' topical knowledge as L2 reading strategy; • promotes using contextual cues as an L2 reading strategy; • a teacher uses a reading passage for more than one purpose.
Language learning	• homework necessary; • students should be active learners when learning a language.

continued, 'I like to have them work in pairs or groups and that way they can kind of see what other students think or see it from a different point of view.' He said that he preferred using pair and group work as a method of teaching because he said 'it gives them a chance to practice answering questions so when they talk as a class, it's less intimidating for them.' Regarding his beliefs about language teaching in general, Dantes stated that he encourages his students to think critically by having his students not focus too much on what the answer is but the reasons for such an answer; as he said I ask questions such as: 'What are your reasons for saying this is the answer?'

Regarding the teaching of L2 reading, Dantes said that he believes that teachers should help students develop their reading 'skills and strategies like scanning and skimming to draw out the main points of a reading passage.' Another reading strategy that Dantes said he finds important is activating students' prior knowledge of a topic; he stated, 'First I like to get them thinking about the topic and I'll do that by using specific pre-reading activities, or discussion questions that makes them draw on their own knowledge of the topic.' Dantes also expressed that he believes that it is valuable for students to use clues from the text to help them 'to understand vocabulary words and can also help them to predict content.' He also said that he expects his students to be active and to participate in class; he continued: 'I think when you're more active you tend to retain a lot more information.' In relation to active learning, Dantes also said that he finds homework to be very important for his students; he stated, 'Homework is important because for one you have extra time to look at something. If you practice you get better at doing something. Also you'll retain information better.' The following section outlines Dantes' classroom practices.

2 What are Dantes' classroom practices?

This section answers the second research question: what are Dantes' classroom practices? Table 2 outlines Dantes' classroom practices during each of the six observed lessons.

Table 2. Dantes' classroom practices.

Observed practices	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Teacher gave extra time in class to complete exercises.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher took up activities in a step-by-step process.	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
Students worked on activities in pairs or groups.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher used various means to guide students to answer.	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
Teacher assigned homework at the end of the class.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×
Students required to provide reasons for their answers.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher facilitated class discussions.	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Teacher read a passage with the class.	×	×	✓	×	×	✓
Teacher encouraged students to use information from text.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The other language skills were practiced in the class.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Skimming and scanning was highlighted in the activity.	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes. Each lesson is identified by the main activities completed during the lesson. D1 = Dantes' Lesson 1: Dictionary Skills/Information Recall; D2 = Dantes' Lesson 2: Dictionary Skills (continued) / Word forms; D3 = Dantes' Lesson 3: Pre-reading Discussion questions / True and False; D4 = Dantes' Lesson 4: True and False (continued) / Passage Analysis; D5 = Dantes' Lesson 5: Information Recall; D6 = Dantes' Lesson 6: Exam Review (Pre-reading discussion questions / True and False); ✓ = observed practices # = limited occurrence; × = not observed.

As Table 2 indicates, many classroom practices were observed consistently across all six lessons while only a few were not observed during each lesson. For example, across all six lessons Dantes was observed giving extra time in class to complete exercises, he encouraged students to use information from the text to aid their comprehension, students worked on activities in pairs or groups and they were required to provide reasons for their answers; he also had students practice other language skills besides reading. Other practices that were observed in all but one class were Dantes took up activities in a step-by-step process; he used various means to guide students to the answer, he assigned homework at the end of each class, and he highlighted skimming and scanning as a reading strategy in all but one class. He was only observed facilitating class discussions and reading a passage with the class in two out of six classes and did not use humor as a teaching strategy in all but one of the observed classes. The first observed lesson will be outlined in detail to show how many of these strategies were implemented as this lesson was representative of most of the observed lessons that followed.

Prior to the first observed lesson, Dantes said that his lesson objectives were to have students practice scanning for specific information and to practice identifying the correct meaning of a vocabulary word based on the sentence context. These skills were practiced through two activities from the textbook, which had also been assigned as previous homework. Thus, Dantes' first observed lesson began with a homework check whereby the homework was an information recall activity and a dictionary skills activity. However, after the start of class Dantes observed that some students had not completed the homework and therefore he allowed his students more time to complete it. Then after approximately 10 minutes, Dantes divided his students into groups and assigned each group questions from the information recall activity. The groups were expected to compare

answers, and one member from each group was responsible for writing the groups' answers on the whiteboard. Once all of the answers were written on the whiteboard, Dantes, along with his students, examined each groups' answers together.

Dantes followed a certain method while examining each answer. He first read the question and the groups' written response aloud. Next, he asked his students whether they agreed or disagreed that it was a good response. If they agreed, he then asked his students where they found the information from the reading passage. If they disagreed, he asked his students how to fix the answer. In some situations, it was observed that students did not know the answer. Dantes gave his students clues that would guide them towards the correct answer. For example, Excerpt 1 outlines how Dantes' attempted to direct the discussion.

Excerpt 1

D: Okay and number 7 'How did the air in the second chamber escape?' *[reads response on whiteboard] Compare it with the air of the present and then examine the differences especially in the difference in levels of carbon dioxide.* Is that a good answer?

Ss: Yes.

D: You sure?

Ss: Yes.

D: [repeats question 7] 'How does the air in the second chamber escape?' Does this answer the question? [No response]

D: So air escaped from the second room. So the question is asking how did that happen.S1: Open the others small hole?

D: Small hole? But didn't they have special equipment to stop that from happening? So how did the air escape? So maybe if you look at line 43-48. Okay? See if you can find an answer there.
     [Gives students a minute to read lines]

D: Okay, so let's look at line 43 'investigate an ancient location, photograph it, and leave it untouched. When archeologist opened the first chamber, they removed the boat. The Egyptian government built a museum the site for the first boat. During the construction of the museum, the vibrations from the heavy machinery disturbed the second room and probably destroyed the seal. Water leaked in, too, so the second boat was not as well preserved as the first boat.'

S2:   The heavy machinery?

D: Right so the heavy machinery generated vibrations. Okay [writes new answer on board]

[*Key.* D = Dantes; Ss = students collectively; S1 = one student]

As can be seen in except 1, Dantes attempted to guide his students to the answer by providing them with a range of lines from the reading passage where the answer could be found. When all of the answers had been given for the information recall activity, Dantes started checking answers for the dictionary skills activity. When this activity was taken

Table 3. Dantes' beliefs and classroom practices.

Theme	Beliefs	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Language teaching	• help students develop language abilities;	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• help students develop skills necessary for their learning purposes;	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕
	• choose topics students find interesting;	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕	✕
	• importance of pair and group work;	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• develop students' critical thinking skills.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teaching L2 reading	• help students develop reading skills and strategies;	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• use of skimming and scanning;	✓	✕	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• activate student's background knowledge;	✕	✕	✓	✕	✕	✓
	• promote using contextual cues;	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• importance of activities that accompany a reading passage.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Language learning	• homework necessary;	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✕
	• students should be active learners.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes. D1 = Dantes' Lesson 1: Dictionary Skills / Information Recall; D2 = Dantes' Lesson 2: Dictionary Skills (continued) / Word forms; D3 = Dantes' Lesson 3: Pre-reading Discussion questions / True and False; D4 = Dantes' Lesson 4: True and False (continued) / Multiple Choice; D5 = Dantes' Lesson 5: Information Recall; D6 = Dantes' Lesson 6: Exam Review (Pre-reading discussion questions / True and False); ✓ = observed practices # = limited occurrence; ✕ = not observed.

up, it was observed that Dantes first read aloud the various definitions of the vocabulary word provided by the textbook and then read the sentence that provided the vocabulary word. It was also observed that his students had difficulty with this particular activity. During instances where the students did not know the answer, it was observed that Dantes implemented various methods in order to guide his students toward the answer. For example, Dantes drew illustrations on the whiteboard to further elaborate on the various definitions, narrowed down the possible definitions of the vocabulary word, or sometimes used both for this particular activity. Dantes was unable to complete this activity and told the class that they would continue the activity during the next day's lesson. At the end of the class, Dantes assigned more activities as homework. Many of the activities outlined above were also repeated in the five other lessons that were observed. We now present the findings for the third research question about the relationship between Dantes' professed beliefs as compared to his observed classroom practices.

3   What is the relationship between Dantes' professed beliefs and classroom practices?

Table 3 outlines the comparison between Dantes' professed beliefs and his observed classroom practices. The professed beliefs are categorized by their themes: language teaching, teaching L2 reading, and language learning. Each belief is compared to whether it was observed during each of the six observed lessons.

As Table 3 indicates, although his professed teaching beliefs mostly converged with his classroom practices, there were also some practices that tended to diverge from his beliefs. In relation to language teaching, Dantes stated that a teacher helps students develop overall language abilities (listening, speaking and writing). It was observed in all lessons that Dantes included activities aimed at addressing not just reading but also listening, speaking, and writing. For example, he used pair and group work (all lessons) in addition to class discussions (e.g. lesson 3 and lesson 5) to promote listening and speaking, and his students wrote answers to promote writing (e.g. lesson 1 and lesson 5). Dantes also stated the importance of pair and group work in the classroom, and all six of the observed lessons demonstrated this belief. Additionally, Dantes said that he wanted his students to think critically; all six of his observed classroom practices demonstrated examples of this belief. Dantes also said that it was important to make his classes interesting for his students; however this belief was difficult to observe during his lessons as he was not clear about how he defined interesting, and we did not interview any of his students as to whether or not they found his classes interesting.

In terms of Dantes' beliefs about teaching L2 reading, there was mainly convergence with his classroom practices. For example, Dantes said that a teacher helps students develop reading skills and strategies. During each lesson, students were observed practicing various reading skills and strategies through the assigned activities. Some of the observed reading skills and strategies included skimming (all lessons), scanning (all lessons), predicting reading content (e.g. lesson 3 and lesson 6) and using contextual clues (all lessons). Dantes also said that he finds it important for teachers to prompt students to use contextual clues to gather information about a reading passage. He demonstrated this belief in the observed lessons by requiring his students to include the information they used to arrive at a particular answer. Dantes also stressed the importance of skimming and scanning. During all but one of the lessons, it was observed that Dantes had his students' practice skimming and scanning through activities such as true/false (e.g. lessons 3, 4 and 6) and a passage analysis (e.g. lesson 1 and lesson 5). In addition, Dantes stated that it was important to activate students' background knowledge of a topic; however, this belief was only observed in two of the six lessons.

We also observed some classroom practices that Dantes had not professed as his beliefs. For instance, during the lessons, it was observed that Dantes liked to encourage his learners to go through a step-by-step process when working on particular activities that he assigned them. There was one particular classroom example that illustrated this in some detail. During the third lesson, the students were assigned a true/false activity. Dantes was monitoring his students' progress when he noticed that one students' answer was incorrect, and so he attempted to guide the student toward the correct answer in a step-by-step procedure as outlined in extract 2:

Extract 2

D: Okay so read the next sentence. Dozen people in the room. So have you got a specific number yet?

S: No.

D: No? What's a dozen?

S: I don't know.
D: Check the dictionary.
S: Twelve.
D: Twelve, right? So is that a specific number of people?
S: Yeah.
D: Right okay so let's go back to this one. It says what does it tell you? So maybe more than ten people? So is 12 more than ten people?
S: More.
D: More. So are these two ideas the same?
S: Same.
D: So is it true or is it false?
S: It's true.
D: Right.
[*Key*. D = Dantes; S = student]

When asked about this observation, Dantes said that he now realizes that he has his 'students go through a step by step process when doing activities. As well, you may be able to see which of your teaching practices/techniques work and which ones do not.'

Another observable practice that was not professed in his beliefs was related to the classroom environment and affectivity. We noted that Dantes tended to use a lot of humor throughout the six lessons. Of course this practice is consistent with Senior's (2006) report that language teachers use humor to encourage spontaneity and ready interaction, but Dantes was surprised to hear that we observed this in his classes but that on reflection he uses humor to motivate his students. Thus some of Dantes' observed classroom practices contained beliefs that he had not professed in the interview nor written in his journals. This finding is consistent with research that suggests that a teacher may have difficulty verbalizing the reasons for particular practices because they are either not fully aware of these beliefs, i.e. they may be still in formation and thus not fully developed (Sinprajakpol, 2004). As Senior (2006) has observed, a teacher's beliefs 'are constantly developing and evolving as insights from new teaching situations are fed into their personal frameworks' (p. 248).

In addition, it is also possible that some of Dantes' beliefs may have been formed before he began to teach (such as his experience as a learner) and may have influenced his classroom practices, yet it is also conceivable that some of his classroom practices may have re-shaped his beliefs. So the question remains as to what is the relationship between beliefs and practice and which drives which? Perhaps the best answer is that there is an interactive relationship in which beliefs influence classroom actions while classroom experiences and more importantly conscious reflection (as was reported on in this article) on those experiences in turn can influence and even change those beliefs (Breen et al., 2001). Hence the need and importance in teacher education and development programs of eliciting both novice and experienced teachers' beliefs and using this articulation as a basis for comparison and reflection on classroom practices. Dantes' beliefs about learning showed the strongest convergence with his classroom practices. Consistent with his belief that it is important for students to be active language learners, Dantes encouraged participation in his class in many instances. Furthermore, Dantes

stated that homework was necessary, and he assigned homework during every lesson except the last, as it was the last class of the semester.

4   How does reflection facilitate Dantes' exploration of his beliefs and practices?

The final research question examined the overall role of reflection in facilitating Dantes' exploration of his beliefs and practices. Prior to participation in this study, Dantes noted that he was not consciously aware of his beliefs about teaching L2 reading until he was asked directly about them during interviews. So, to a certain extent, Dantes noted that he had experienced some difficulties articulating what he considered his beliefs during the interviews and when asked to articulate what he was thinking and why he was teaching in particular ways when he was observed. This finding shows the importance of providing opportunities for language teachers to be able to bring their beliefs to the level of awareness so that they can, as Leung (2009) has recently noted, become more 'engaged in reflexive examination of their own beliefs and action' (p. 53). Dantes noted that he was surprised at what he discovered with the results of his reflections on his beliefs and practices. He specifically mentioned that he was surprised at the whole issue of his step-by-step approach in his teaching as he had not realized he did this before. On reflection now he suggests that the source of this practice stems from when he was a learner: he would always break down large assignments into smaller manageable tasks so he could better manage the task. As Dantes recalled:

> I remembered that trying to tackle an assignment as a whole was a daunting task. Instead, breaking it into smaller manageable parts was a better approach. I didn't realize that I used this process so much in the classroom now as a teacher.

He then noted that he would retain this belief now that it had become part of his practice because it has always helped him in the past and so he could now help his students.

We are not sure if Dantes has overtly changed any of his beliefs as a result of these reflections (although, as pointed out above, he seemed to retain most) as this was his first time to articulate them and consider their importance to him as a language teacher and in particular when teaching L2 reading. However, we can say that he has started to examine them closely and question their relevance to his current teaching situation. For example, and as he noted above, he said that he is beginning to consider what practices he currently incorporates into this teaching that are influenced from his past learning experiences, if these are still relevant, and what practices are constrained or encouraged by the context he is teaching in at present. As Dante mentioned:

> My experiences as a learner and my training have had an impact on the way I go about presenting an activity, doing an activity and taking up the answers and results of an activity. Depending on the activity, time constraints and limitations of classroom equipment, I may modify an activity but until now I did not really think about all this. I just did it.

Consequently, at the end of the period of the study Dantes noted that engaging in reflective practice was a very valuable experience for him because it helped him gain a clearer insight into his beliefs and practices. Dantes continued:

> Teachers and instructors can gain a lot by reflecting on their beliefs and practices. Reflection is a tool that can help teachers move in the right direction. In my situation, the reflective practice process was very enlightening and non-threatening.

The combination of talking and writing about his beliefs and practices as well has engaging in classroom observation all seemed to contribute to his exploration of his beliefs and practices. As a result of his reflections Dantes was in a better position to discover whether there was any gap between what he was teaching and what his students were learning. More specifically, talking and writing seemed to help the Dante to articulate his beliefs about teaching L2 reading; as Dantes observed: 'You can gain insight into how your experiences as a teacher and as a student have impacted or influenced the way you teach.' Once Dantes had brought his beliefs to the level of awareness through discussion and writing, he was in a position to be able to examine and reflect on them more closely and observe if they were reflected in his classroom practices. Dante noted: 'I was able to see that the type of activities, the way I run an activity and the ways in which I explain or clarify can be traced back to my previous experiences.' Walsh (2006) too has noted the importance of self-evaluation based on classroom observation when he pointed out that observations are 'of considerable value as a process of consciousness raising and enhancing understanding' (p. 127). Dantes continued: 'Whether you review the outcome of your last lesson or get observed by a second party, I recommend that all teachers and instructors reflect on themselves and their teaching abilities. There is so much to gain from reflecting.'

V Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that Dantes' professed beliefs mainly converged with his classroom practices. When consulted about this finding during the follow-up interview, Dantes said that one reason he would suggest is that he finds that the course textbook allowed him to carry out some of his professed beliefs. He noted that the layout of the textbook followed a pattern that allowed him to teach the way he wanted with the activities he wanted to use. As the observed practices indicated, and according to Dantes, many of the textbook activities required students to skim or scan the reading passage. So it could be that Dantes used the textbook in order to help carry out his beliefs in his classroom practices. Another possible reason could be related to the origin of one of his beliefs. Richards and Lockhart (1994) have found that 'teachers' beliefs about learning may be based on their training, their teaching experience, or may go back to their own experience as language learners' (p. 34). Dantes said that he considers it important for students to be active language learners in the classroom. He consistently provided such an environment to allow active learning. He also said that this belief derived from his past experiences as a learner.

Although many of Dantes' professed beliefs converged with his classroom practices, there were some that did not. For example, Dantes said that he considers it important to

activate students' knowledge of a topic, but that this was observed only in two lessons. Of course, possible reasons for divergence may be related to the days in which lessons were observed, and especially if the lessons were observed on days when this particular skill was not planned for. Dantes also stated that teachers should choose interesting topics for their students. As observed, Dantes only used topics directly from the textbook and, although this 'belief' about student interest may be difficult to observe, it was not observed in any of the classes that he asked his students if these particular topics were interesting or not.

Dantes seems to have achieved his goal of teaching L2 reading: to provide learners with strategies related to their reading purpose, nature of the text, as well as the context of the situation, a similar goal asserted in the literature on teaching L2 reading (Grabe, 2009). However, the main purpose of this article is not to advocate for the best L2 teaching practices (although most of the practices observed seem to be supported by current research in teaching L2 reading such as developing students' reading strategies with skimming and scanning, using contextual cues, and promoting critical reading), but rather to encourage reflection as a form of self-mediated professional development. The results of this case study suggest that overall the combination of classroom observations, journal writing and discussions all tended to contribute to the exploration of and reflection on teacher beliefs and practices. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will act as a catalyst for encouraging English language teachers to reflect upon their work because there is a need to articulate tacitly held beliefs so that teachers become more aware and have a better understanding of how their beliefs affect classroom practices (Farrell, 2011).

One note of caution on the possible limitations of teachers articulating their beliefs if they do not also compare these stated beliefs with their classroom practices as noted earlier in the article is that some teachers may not be able to verbalize why they have made a particular instructional decision; furthermore, even when beliefs have been articulated, they may be an unreliable guide to the reality of their classroom actions (Pajares, 1992). As such, when beliefs have been stated, teachers should monitor their classroom practices to see if there is evidence of these beliefs in classroom practices (deductive approach) or, alternatively, teachers can look at their teaching first and then stand back and examine what beliefs are being manifested through actual classroom practices (inductive approach). The point about reflecting on the possible alignment between beliefs and practices is not to suggest that one method of teaching (L2 reading or any other macro language skill) is better than any other. Indeed, this 'productive tension' (Freeman, personal communication) between stated beliefs and actual classroom practices provides teachers with the opportunity to systematically look at their practice so that they can deepen their understanding of what they do and thus come to new insights about their students, their teaching, and themselves. Professional growth comes from reconstructing our experiences and then reflecting on these experiences so that we can develop our own approaches to teaching.

The purpose of examining language teacher beliefs and classroom practices is not to look at or for 'best practices'; rather, the idea is to see what *is*, so that teachers can become more confident knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is being reflected in their classroom practices. Dantes said that he realized that reflecting on practice gave him such awareness; Dantes noted:

> In addition to gaining insight into the relationship between past experiences and current beliefs and practices, the reflective practice process can bring to your attention practices that you do intentionally or unintentionally. If it is a positive practice, you may want to do it more often. If it is a negative practice, you may make attempts to stop it.

Since language teachers' beliefs about successful teaching form the core of their teaching behavior, this article has suggested that opportunities be provided for practicing language teachers to articulate and reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices. As Woods (1996) has cautioned, language teachers must be on guard against any claim of 'allegiance to beliefs consistent with what they perceive as the current teaching paradigm rather than consistent with their unmonitored beliefs and their behaviour in class' (p. 71). By engaging in reflective practice teachers can construct and reconstruct their own beliefs and practices so that they can provide optimum learning conditions for their students. Dantes has now realized this:

> In the end, it is about the students and not the teacher. Students place their future in our hands and hope that we, as educators, can help them to reach their goals. It is our duty to know that we are accomplishing that and if not, knowing what we can change so that we can.

VI Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to examine the relationship between one ESL teachers' beliefs and practices relating to L2 reading. Overall, the findings of this article indicate that the teacher's beliefs provided a strong basis for his classroom actions. In addition, some of the observed practices were not articulated in the teacher's beliefs, possibly because they were still developing and forming in his first year of teaching. Consequently, language teachers need to reflect on beliefs and classroom practices because they exist in a symbiotic relationship in which both shape each other, and are shaped by each other (Walsh, 2006). The results of this case study indicate that talking, writing and observing classes all can contribute to the exploration and reflection of teacher beliefs and classroom practices. Although generalizations from this study are difficult, language teachers can learn about the importance and method of comparing their own beliefs with their practices through reflection.

Funding

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