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What is This?

Reflecting on ESL Teacher Beliefs and Classroom Practices: A Case Study

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Abstract
This paper presents a case study that investigated and compared the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices relating to language teaching of one experienced and one novice English language teacher. Areas where observed practices converged with or diverged from stated beliefs are explored and discussed with reference to factors which might have influenced particular practices with respect to grammar teaching. Throughout this study, the novice and experienced teachers are compared with one another. The findings indicate that teachers indeed possess a set of complex beliefs that are not always realized in their classroom practices for a variety of potential reasons: some of these might be directly related to the context of teaching. Further, findings from this study show some similarities with previous studies that have compared experienced teachers with novice teachers.

Introduction

Teaching is now viewed as a cognitive rather than a behavioural activity, and research in second language education has shown that teachers hold a complex set of beliefs about students and pedagogical practices; these beliefs have been shown to influence the instructional judgments and decisions made in classrooms (Borg, 1998, 1999, 2003; Breen, et al., 2001; Farrell and Lim, 2005). Simon Borg suggests that teacher beliefs are concerned with 'what teachers know, believe, and think' (2003: 81) and teachers may have many competing beliefs in play at any one time. Andrews (2003) maintains that even though teachers have many different and sometimes competing beliefs, there is a

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definite relationship that emerges between their beliefs and their classroom practices. Indeed, a recent review of beliefs' research has also demonstrated that language teachers' belief systems do not always correspond with their classroom practices (Basturkmen, 2012). However, not many language teachers are aware of their beliefs and to what extent their beliefs are reflected, or not, in their classroom practices (Farrell, 2007). This paper explores the beliefs and classroom practices of one experienced (over three years' experience) ESL teacher and one novice (under three years' experience) ESL teacher with regard to teaching English as a second language in a private language academy for adults in Canada.

Teacher Beliefs

All teachers have beliefs about teaching and learning. Teacher beliefs reflect personal values and ideologies (Verloop et al., 2001), and as Richards (1996) has pointed out, they reflect individual philosophies of teaching. Michella Borg (2001) defines a belief as, 'a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour' (2001: 186). Studies on teacher beliefs have shown that teacher beliefs can have a profound impact on instructional decisions (Borg, 1998, 2003; Farrell and Lim, 2005). As Breen et al., state, 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' (2001: 473).

Research however, has also indicated that stated beliefs do not always converge with practice (Farrell and Lim, 2005; Richards, 1996) because other issues can also strongly influence and override even strongly held beliefs when informing pedagogical decisions in practice (Borg, 2003; Farrell and Lim, 2005; Richards, 1996). Indeed, as Breen et al., (2001) point out, it is not just the beliefs that influence classroom practices, but these same practices in turn influence (and possibly change) their beliefs. However, Basturkmen's (2012) recent comprehensive review of the research on teacher beliefs and practices indicates that although the majority of studies reviewed (on both experienced and novice teachers) indicate a limited correspondence between teachers' beliefs and their practices, more experienced teachers' beliefs tend to be informed by their teaching experiences and might be expected to correspond better with teaching practices than would the beliefs and practices of novice teachers. Consequently, Basturkmen has suggested that further research on teacher beliefs should consider comparative studies such as the 'study of relatively experienced compared to inexperienced teachers (in a similar or the same school)' (2012: 292). The research presented in this paper is one answer to her call as it examines the beliefs and practices of one novice and one experienced ESL teacher in the same school.

Methodology

The present study utilized a case study approach (Merriam, 1988, 2001) that is exploratory and descriptive in nature to arrive at basic information (Bogdan and Bilken,

1982). As such, the case study reported on in this paper examined the beliefs of one experienced and one novice ESL teacher and their instructional practices. For the purpose of this study, 'experienced' was defined as having three or more years of teaching experience, and 'novice' was defined as having less than three years of teaching experience.

Participants and Context

Two teachers, Sam and Troy (both pseudonyms) volunteered to participate in the study. The experienced teacher, Sam, has worked as an English language teacher for 19 years. The novice teacher, Troy, has worked as an English language instructor for 2.5 years. Both teachers are certified in the Cambridge Certificate in English Teaching to Adults (CELTA) and their Canadian work experience was exclusively in the same adult language academy in Canada where the study took place.

Both teachers taught classes whose levels were 'upper-intermediate', according to the school. Sam, the experienced teacher, was teaching a test-preparation course that involved both written and spoken tasks; accuracy in grammar plays a central role in the students' success on this test. The class met for 25 hours per week. Troy, the novice, taught general English; unlike Sam's students, Troy's students were not training for a specific event; rather, they had enrolled in the integrated skills class for the general purpose of improving their English. The class met for 20 hours per week. Each of the classes consisted of six students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection took place over a one-week period. Several sources of data were collected for each teacher, including: one background survey, three one-hour non-participatory observations with 30-minute pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews. Teachers also submitted all materials involved in the implementation of the observed lesson. In total, each teacher participated in three hours of interviews (six 30-minute interviews) and three hours of classroom observation (three 1-hour sessions).

The semi-structured interview (McDonough and McDonough, 1997) functioned as the primary research tool for obtaining information about the two teachers' beliefs about teaching. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in full, and coded. Data from the observed lessons were collected by means of non-participant observation (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). These data were used to obtain information about the two teachers' actual classroom practices. All observed lessons were videotaped, and subsequently transcribed and coded, as were the observer's field notes.

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Findings from the different sources were validated through a triangulation process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Transcripts were scanned repeatedly for recurring themes (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Observations were checked against the transcripts before any conclusions were drawn. Finally, beliefs and practices were summarized into charts; a comparison of the interview data and the observational data allowed for a comparison between beliefs and practices for each teacher.

Findings

Results of the study are summarized below. First, belief statements are reported. Then classroom practices are reported. Finally, convergence and divergence between stated beliefs and classroom practices is reported for each teacher.

Teachers' Stated Beliefs

Table 1 outlines a summary of the two teachers' belief statements about language teaching in their particular classes as articulated during the interviews. Findings are discussed based on the thematic categories listed in Table 1.

Table 1, the teachers' stated beliefs, indicates that both Sam and Troy agree that effective language teaching could be achieved by means of inductive or deductive approaches. Both stated that the best overall approach is the 'test-teach-test' approach which is a three part lesson where the first part is a diagnostic activity to gauge student abilities, the second is the presentation of the grammar (inductively or deductively), and the third is a practice activity (either communicative or non-communicative). Both expressed stronger support for inductive approaches, in comparison with deductive approaches, based on the belief that rules that are discovered are retained longer in comparison with rules that have been presented explicitly by the teacher. For example, Sam, the experienced teacher said, 'if you challenge someone, it activates their brain power, and they'll remember things more clearly and strongly'. Troy, the novice teacher remarked that students build confidence and feel a sense of pride when they have individually discovered the patterning of a grammar feature.

Despite higher enthusiasm for grammar instruction using the inductive approach, neither teacher discounted the deductive approach on grounds that it has been used for longer and would not be a continued practice if it were ineffective; as Sam stated, the deductive approach is 'tried and true'. Troy also expressed that rules, when presented, should not resemble math equations or appear too technical since this causes many students to 'shut down'; he suggested that visuals such as timelines are more accessible and mentioned, 'I'll be very pleased if they come up with a timeline' when negotiating rules. Both teachers also expressed support for communicative activities. As Troy remarked, 'They're learning the language to communicate, so if I can incorporate communicative speaking tasks into everything I do, all the better'.

Additionally, both Sam and Troy expressed the importance of making the content of the lesson interesting and relevant to the students. Sam correlated personalized content with longer retention especially as it applies to teaching grammar. He expressed: 'Regarding [the sentence] "If Mr. Brown had known this, he would have done something else", my question would be, "Who is Mr. Brown?" I think for my students' benefit, if examples can be personalized, they will remember them more. They need something concrete – something that means something to them.' Troy believes that his students are not particularly interested in grammar, and that in order to keep them engaged, he needs to 'candy-coat' grammar in topics they find interesting. Appealing to student desires is important to Troy, who expressed numerous times that maintaining a good rapport with his students is of the utmost importance even if 'it might come at the consequence of being a truly great teacher'.

Table 1. Teachers' Belief Statements.

Theme	Belief	Sam	Troy
Approaches	In language teaching, there are benefits associated with:		
	• Inductive approach	✓	✓
	• Deductive approach	✓	✓
	• 'Test-teach-test' approach	✓	✓
	• Communicative approach	✓	✓
	• Lessons should be grounded in a context or theme that the students find interesting or relevant	✓	✓
Teaching and Learning	In language teaching, there are benefits associated with:		
	• Individual discovery	▶	✓
	• Joint negotiation	✓	✓
	• Making mistakes is necessary for learning	▶	✓
	• Personally meaningful content will yield larger gains	✓	✓
	• Some concepts take longer to acquire than others	✓	▶
	• Students who are more experimental with language tend to learn it more successfully	✓	▶
Accuracy	Accuracy is more important than fluency	✓	✗
	• It is important for students to value accuracy	✓	▶
	• It is important for students to hear accurate models	▶	✓
	• It is important to check for comprehension by monitoring progress	✓	✓
	• Frequent error correction on an ongoing basis is necessary for gains in accuracy	✓	✓
Error Correction (perceptions of students' wants/needs)	• Students expect error correction	✓	✓
	• Students want strategies for fixing their errors	✓	▶
	Students need:		
	• Error correction that is not shaming	▶	✓
	• Opportunities to self-correct prior to the teacher providing the correct answer	✓	✓
	• Different students require different techniques for error correction	✓	✓
	• Teachers need a diverse variety of correction techniques	✓	✓
Error Correction (implementation and characteristics)	• The 'face correction' technique emulates real world experience	✓	▶
	• Error correction should occur after a communicative speaking activity	✓	✓
	• Students should not be interrupted for error correction in the middle of a sentence	✗	✓
	• Self-correction is best	✓	✓

Key: ✓= agrees; ✗= disagrees; ▶= Did not state.

Sam and Troy both expressed that joint negotiation is beneficial to learning. For example Troy expressed support for joint negotiation of meaning when he said that sometimes 'many heads are better than one'. Sam similarly expressed that joint negotiation is worthwhile; as he noted: 'Amongst your peers, you're allowed to fight for your opinion without any kind of incrimination.'

Sam said he believes that accuracy is more important than fluency in language learning. He stated, 'Some people believe in fluency; I am a big believer in accuracy.' However, he said he believes that errors should 'generally be addressed after a communicative speaking activity'. Troy, on the other hand, said that he believes that successful communication is more important than accuracy. Consistently throughout interviews, Troy conveyed that the flow of communication should not be disrupted in a speaking activity in order to address accuracy. For example, he stated that 'if students are in the middle of saying something, usually, they're aware they're making errors, but if you, if you jump in too quickly, you can really stifle the flow of what they're saying'.

Both teachers also stated that frequent error correction on an ongoing basis, even for errors outside the scope of a given lesson, is necessary for improving accuracy. For example, Troy stated that similar 'mistakes are made over and over, and they get corrected a lot. Slowly, students start to get the rule. I think some errors take a little bit of time to overcome'. Sam noted that some concepts take longer to acquire, and, therefore, one correction is often not sufficient, 'especially in the case of fossilized errors'. Sam remarked, 'if teachers let errors persist, students will adopt them, and they will not be able to get rid of them'.

Both teachers expressed that students expect and want their errors corrected. Troy remarked that error correction is 'one of the major reasons why they have a teacher'. Sam stated that students go to school to learn English because 'they want their errors pointed out, and because they want strategies for fixing them'. Further, Sam noted, 'Error correction is necessary in order to avoid fossilization of errors'. Troy stressed the importance of his classroom being a safe place to make mistakes; he mentioned several times that students need 'error correction techniques that are not shaming'. For example, Troy said, 'My classroom is a safe place for people to make mistakes and have them corrected delicately'. Both teachers noted the importance of having a variety of correction techniques to accommodate the diverse learning styles and needs of different students. Troy stated that this was essential because one must 'consider the student being corrected and the context of the lesson'. Sam similarly noted, 'Some students' sensitivities require error correction to be done differently'. Both teachers described the ideal scenario as one in which students self-correct their errors, and both noted the importance of having techniques that encourage self-correction. Sam said he felt that way because it demonstrates that the 'student already had the answer', and as a teacher, it is his job to 'bring it out of them'. Troy said that self-correction was important because it allows him to balance the wrongness of having made an error by being able to 'praise them for a correct self-correction'.

Classroom Practices

Table 2 outlines a summary of the teachers' observed classroom practices.

Table 2. Teachers' Classroom Practices.

Theme	Practice	S1	S2	S3	T1	T2	T3
Lesson Approaches	• Language was presented through rules (deductively)	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Language was presented through examples (inductively)	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×
	• Instructions were detailed	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓
	• Teacher encouraged students to negotiate grammar rules together	✓	✓	✓	▶	▶	×
	• Language was practiced communicatively at some point during the lesson through a speaking or writing task	▶	×	✓	✓	✓	▶
	• Grammar was practiced using worksheets	✓	✓	×	×	▶	×
	• Feedback was provided consistently throughout the lesson	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Grammar was linked with a theme or topic	×	×	✓	✓	✓	▶
Accuracy	• Monitored student progress passively (listening to or reading student output)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Ongoing head-nodding to indicate accuracy	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×
	• Asked concept checking questions	×	×	✓	✓	✓	▶
Error Correction	• High frequency of error correction	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
	• Used a diverse variety of error correction techniques	▶	✓	▶	×	▶	▶
	• Used a specific exaggerated facial gesture to indicate an error had occurred	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×
	• Errors outside the scope of the lesson were corrected	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Provided correct answer with explanation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	▶
	• Encouraged/elicited self-correction	✓	✓	✓	▶	✓	▶
	• Left error uncorrected	×	▶	×	✓	×	×
	• Pointed out error and asked class to explain the problem	×	✓	✓	×	×	×
	• Provided error correction as a whole-class interaction	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Provided error correction to specific students (one-on-one)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	• Signaled location of error by asking a yes-no question	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓
	• Repeated error with different intonation to signal error location	×	×	×	✓	✓	✓

Key: ✓ = agrees; × = disagrees; ▶ = Did not state.

Sam's first observed lesson (S1) was on the topic of relative pronouns and it began with a communicative speaking task, designed as a game that tested whether or not students were using relative pronouns. Sam did not explain the rules of the game. After 10 minutes the game was interrupted by the teacher for clarification of the rules. Following

rule clarification, the activity continued for 13 minutes. After the game, students worked to negotiate rules regarding reduced relative clauses together as a class. Throughout, it was observed that students asked many questions, and provided many example sentences that included relative clauses. After approximately 25 minutes, the rules were deciphered, the students practiced grammar through transformation activities in a worksheet taken from a grammar textbook. This task lasted approximately 10 minutes; answers were taken up orally afterwards.

In Sam's second lesson (S2) on the topic of conjunctions, students were initially presented with three sentences on the board and were asked to improve them in any way. Sam elicited ways in which to improve upon the sentences, including the use of conjunctions. Students worked in groups to write sentences that incorporated the suggestions for approximately 25 minutes. During this task, Sam provided feedback after each set of sentences. The final task in the observed lesson was a writing activity aimed at preparing the students for a speaking test. Sam told the students to write sentences about their hometowns, and they were encouraged to use conjunctions. Finally, at the end of the observed lesson, students were handed a worksheet activity taken from a grammar text.

Sam's third observed lesson (S3) on conditionals involved several cycles of presentation of the rules through an example sentence and elicitation followed by a communicative speaking activity to practice the given conditional. Presentation of the example sentences involved the presentation of the 'if clause' of the conditional. Sam elicited potential main clauses through the use of leading questions. The communicative speaking activities observed involved the students asking one another about their weekend plans. For example, the question 'What do you usually do on weekends?' was used to practice the zero conditional. Within the observed lesson, three conditionals were covered.

As Table 2 indicates, Troy's observed lessons generally followed the deductive approach. In his first lesson (T1) on narrative tenses, Troy asked his students to identify the tenses used in narratives. Students then read an excerpt from a novel, and were required to pick out example sentences for each of the tenses discussed. It was observed that Troy subsequently wrote example sentences taken from the reading that included two verbs of different tenses (e.g. 'When the phone rang, I was shaving'). Troy asked the students to describe the order of events by asking which action had occurred first. To clarify the concept, he elaborated similar example sentences that had either similar or different word order variation. He asked concept-checking questions about each sentence.

In Troy's second lesson (T2) on the difference between 'used to' and 'would' for past habits, he began by presenting students with example sentences. Students were told to decipher rules for themselves; however, after 2 minutes, Troy ended up going through the examples with the students and eliciting or providing answers. Students practiced the grammar in two observed communicative speaking activities. In the first activity, students asked one another about their past habits for approximately 10 minutes. Following the activity, feedback was observed which entailed the students reporting their questions back to the teacher. The second observed communicative speaking activity was a role-play activity involving newspaper reporters and recent lottery winners; reporters asked winners questions about how their lives had changed since winning the lottery. Students

were observed taking turns asking and answering questions as a whole group for approximately 15 minutes.

In Troy's third observed lesson (T3), students were presented with rules for writing more advanced statements using comparative adjectives. Students worked independently to create their own example sentences, and these were shared both orally and with the use of the whiteboard. In total, this phase lasted approximately 20 minutes. In this particular lesson, it was observed that Troy abandoned his original plan that was discussed in the pre-interview involving a communicative speaking task. In lieu of practicing the advanced points surrounding comparative adjectives, which were the focus of the first stage of lesson, the focus shifted to practicing comparative and superlative forms in an observed activity which entailed ranking five pictures for a given criterion. This aspect of the lesson was observed to span the remainder of the lesson.

Regarding accuracy and comprehension, in all observed lessons Sam signalled whether or not a student was accurate by nodding or shaking his head, as Table 2 indicates. This practice was not observed in any of Troy's observed lessons. However, in T3, it was observed that Troy ensured that the students' answers were accurate prior to having them record them on the board. As Table 2 also indicates, Troy was observed asking concept checking questions in order to check for comprehension; this practice was seldom observed within Sam's lessons.

With respect to error correction, it was observed that Sam interrupted students frequently to address errors of all types in all of the observed lessons. Most frequently, he interrupted the output, used a facial contortion to signal a grammatical error, and as an attempt to elicit a correction from the student; whenever a student was unable to correct the given error, it was observed that Sam deferred to the rest of the class for input. Other error correction techniques employed during the observed lessons, though less frequently observed, included the following: finger correction for word order, the use of leading yes-no questions, the use of overt statements to indicate the error had occurred, and post-activity error correction using the whiteboard. In these cases, it was observed that Sam encouraged the student to self-correct before providing them with an answer. Throughout the observed lessons, the vast majority of the errors that occurred were addressed.

In general, it was observed that Troy corrected errors frequently. Like Sam, it was observed that Troy addressed errors that fell outside the scope of the lesson. Troy's most frequent error correction technique throughout each observed lesson was echoing the error with rising intonation to signal the location of the error. When students did not self-correct, it was observed that he offered an explanation and suggestions for how to correct the error; however, self-correction was encouraged or elicited with a lower frequency than the indication of an error having occurred. It was seldom, but nevertheless, observed that errors were corrected by means of reformulation with and without indication of the error having occurred. Other error correction techniques employed during the observed lessons, were the use of leading yes-no questions to signal the location of an error and, although quite seldom observed, anonymous error correction on the board and writing down errors in a notebook which were explained following a speaking activity. As Table 2 indicates, Troy left errors unaddressed at times. Throughout, as noted above, it was observed that Troy monitored student progress, and he provided one-on-one error correction during independent and pair-work. As well, error correction was also observed to

have taken place as a whole class interaction. Finally, in all observed lessons, Troy addressed errors after students finished speaking, rather than interrupting them.

Beliefs and Classroom Practices

Sam's Beliefs and Practices

Generally, Sam's beliefs tend to converge with his classroom practices but there were also some instances where they diverged. With respect to Sam's beliefs about grammar presentation and approach, his beliefs and practices converge. Sam stated that his preferred lesson structure was the 'test-teach-test' approach and all three lessons followed this model. He articulated that he prefers practice activities to be communicative; however, target grammar was only practiced communicatively in one of the three lessons. Additionally, Sam conveyed that to promote longer retention, it is important for him to create memorable example sentences that are either about the students themselves or personalized such that they would hold significant meaning for the students; however, this practice was not observed. Furthermore, only one of three lessons involved grammar in a contextualized theme, despite the fact that he expressed its importance for him. Consistent with his beliefs about joint negotiation being beneficial to learning, he allowed and encouraged many instances of collaboration and debate with respect to rule negotiation.

Perhaps most strongly convergent are Sam's beliefs and practices pertaining to accuracy and error correction. He stated that he is a big proponent for accuracy, and the high frequency of error correction is congruent with this belief. Though Sam noted the importance of having many error correction techniques, he relied quite heavily upon 'face-correction' which involves facial contortion to signal an error and elicit self-correction. Additionally, Sam said that error correction should follow a communicative activity. In practice, students were often interrupted with 'face-correction' during communicative speaking tasks.

Troy's Beliefs and Practices

Overall, Troy's beliefs tended to diverge from his classroom practices but there were instances where they converged as well. An example of divergence was where although Troy talks about his beliefs about the benefits of using an inductive approach, in practice, this presentation occurred only briefly, despite specific lesson plans to implement it. In addition, although he expressed that lessons should follow the 'test-teach-test' model, his observed lessons generally did not incorporate the initial 'test' phase. With respect to error correction, beliefs both converged and diverged with practice. Troy stated it was important to correct student errors; however, there were several observed instances when errors were not corrected. When errors were corrected, Troy was observed most frequently echoing the error and, sometimes, he gave an opportunity for the students to self-correct. This converges with his belief that students should be able to self-correct prior to being told an answer. At other times, Troy echoed an error and corrected it himself.

Maintaining a good rapport with the students was also a top priority for Troy. In fact, departing from the lesson plan on a few occasions appeared to be motivated by his desire to maintain strong relationships with the students. This was also expressed several times

during interviews. For example, Troy said, 'There is a strong rapport between all of us. I'm going to make that work as much as it can for me just to make it simpler to convey some of these ideas'. It is possible that Troy could equate a high level of student involvement with having a good rapport with them. Gatbonton (2008) also discovered that novice teachers tend to care most about the following when making pedagogical decisions: student behaviour, student reactions, student levels of engagement, and the relationship with the students. In Troy's case, it seems that this holds true. For example, when Troy abandoned the inductive approach in T2, it appeared to be motivated by his perception of the students' lack of enthusiasm for the particular task. Whether or not his strongly held belief regarding student rapport is due to individual variables or due to the fact that he is a novice teacher cannot be fully determined.

Discussion

Results from this case study seem to confirm Basturkmen's conclusion to her review of the research on teacher beliefs and classroom practices that: 'More experienced teachers are likely to have more experientially informed beliefs than relative novices, and principles or beliefs informed by teaching experiences might be expected to correspond clearly with teaching practices' (2012: 288). However, while Sam, the more experienced teacher, tended to practice what he said he would, incidental aspects of his teaching practice especially with error correction, diverged from his stated beliefs about error correction. This divergence of the experienced teacher's beliefs and practices could be explained by such issues as time constraints within a lesson that made it difficult to put his beliefs fully into practice. In fact, throughout the interview and after the classroom observations Sam spoke constantly about how teaching decisions were constrained by time factors. On numerous occasions, he expressed that, as a teacher, he needs to make choices about how much time to devote to a single feature of grammar, since the students' test encompasses a large amount of grammatical information which had yet to be covered thus far in the class. Farrell and Lim's (2005) study revealed that the experienced teachers expressed similar concerns regarding time constraints.

Regarding the almost exclusive use of 'face-correction', the possibility remains that Sam felt that 'face-correction' was more effective for all of the students in that particular class. In interviews, Sam expressed that it was important to have a variety of techniques because different students have different learning styles. In the case of this particular class, Sam possibly felt that each student could gain from that particular method. Alternatively, as Farrell and Lim (2005) have noted, there can be a discrepancy between what teachers think they do in their classroom and what they actually do.

In the novice teacher's case (Troy), although the results point to more divergence than convergence between his stated beliefs and classroom practices, in actual fact this was not clear cut because he experimented with and tested a number of approaches and techniques while he was teaching, which suggested that many of his beliefs were not stable at the time of the interviews. Because he was a novice teacher at the time of the study, it is also possible that he was not sure of his beliefs as they were still in the process of forming (Basturkmen, 2012) and that this study was the first time that he had been asked to verbalize his beliefs. In addition, as Senior (2006) has pointed out, teachers (experienced and novice) may vary to the extent they can articulate their beliefs in that teachers may

not be able to verbalize why they have made a particular decision while teaching partly because these beliefs are forever changing.

Gatbonton (2008) has argued that novice teachers' beliefs are less likely to be rigid, as they have had fewer opportunities to revisit recurring issues and make generalizations. Though this particular point might not hold true for all novice teachers, it is possible that Troy is still negotiating his beliefs about how to teach grammar. Alternatively, Farrell's (1999) study indicated that reflection encouraged teachers to be more open and flexible with respect to their beliefs in a particular method, approach, or technique for grammar teaching. It is possible that the reflective aspect of this study prompted him not to commit whole-heartedly to any particular belief.

In addition, it seems that Troy's correction techniques appear to have been influenced by his desire to maintain a good rapport with the group as well. As Troy expressed during interviews, the techniques used were not meant to shame the students; in fact, students were corrected extremely delicately. Troy constantly monitored student progress to address accuracy one-on-one, and his use of indirect correction techniques such as reformulation without acknowledgement of an error having occurred further exemplifies this point.

Furthermore, Troy also expressed that being observed made him feel uneasy. The data collection process might have influenced his teaching practices such that they were not realized as they might have been in absence of the observer and video camera. This is an example of a contextual factor that Borg (2003) has argued could influence practice.

The results of this case study also indicate that Sam, the more experienced teacher, made instructional decisions for the most part based on his perceptions of his students' learning. Troy, the novice teacher, on the other hand, made instructional decisions based on keeping his students happy; he focused more closely upon needs associated with general comfort levels of his students. Sam focused more closely on needs associated with learning outcomes. Where the experienced teacher appeared to make decisions based on what his students needed in terms of being able to demonstrate particular skills, the novice teacher seemed to make decisions based on what he perceived his students wanted out of their lessons. This particular distinction between novice and experienced teachers has also been observed in past research (Gatbonton, 2008).

This was the first time both teachers were asked about their beliefs and how they compared to their classroom practices. Indeed, prior to participation in this study, the two teachers were not consciously aware of their beliefs about teaching until they were asked directly about them during interviews; this was evidenced by several occasions of hesitation and time spent thinking about and reformulating points while expressing beliefs. One problem with examining teachers' beliefs is that they often remain hidden to the teacher and so must be brought to the level of awareness by being articulated in some way. When teachers are given a chance to articulate their beliefs about teaching and learning, they soon discover that their beliefs are far from simple. Consequently, if second language teachers are asked to think consciously about their teaching beliefs, they could learn not only about these usually tacitly held beliefs, but also about the importance of comparing their own beliefs with their practices through classroom observations (recorded and transcribed), discussion (pair or

group) and reflection (Farrell, 2007). As Basturkmen has recently noted, 'Teacher educators can have some confidence that eliciting experienced teachers' stated beliefs could provide a meaningful basis for discussion and reflection on planned aspects of practice' (2012: 291). The point in reflecting on the alignment between beliefs and classroom practices is not to suggest that one method of teaching is better than any other. Exploring language teachers' beliefs and corresponding classroom practices can help clarify how teachers can implement any changes to their approaches to teaching and learning over time. Therefore, it is hoped that this case study report will act as a catalyst for encouraging English language teachers (both novice and experienced) to reflect upon their work (Farrell, 2007). As Richards and Lockhart suggest, reflecting on beliefs and practices 'involves posing questions about how and why things are the way they are, what value systems they represent, what alternatives might be available, and what the limitations are of doing things one way as opposed to another' (1994: 6). If teachers are active reflectors of what is happening in their classrooms, they can better position themselves to discover whether there is any gap between what they teach and what their students learn.

Conclusion

This exploratory case study investigated the stated beliefs and classroom practices of one novice and one experienced teacher of ESL in a private language academy in Canada. The findings indicate that although the experienced teacher's classroom practices were more clearly related to his beliefs, there were instances where they diverged and these divergences may be normal as teachers react to the natural flow of the development of the lesson where the teacher adjusts to the realities of the classroom. The findings also suggest that there was a 'tenuous relationship' (Basturkmen, et al., 2004: 243) in novice teacher's beliefs and classroom practices, but again it is noted that there were also instances where they sometimes converged. Although this is a case study of just two teachers and as such may have limitations as to how the results can be generalized, and that the findings indicate that both teachers showed instances of convergence and divergence that were not always clear to distinguish, nevertheless, the case study does show that language teachers need to be challenged to reflect on their existing beliefs and classroom teaching practices and to 'question those beliefs in the light of what they intellectually know and not simply what they intuitively feel' (Johnson 1994: 439). 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 teachers can become more confident knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is being practiced in their classes.

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