

‘If I Wanted To Survive I Had To Use It’: The Power of Teacher Beliefs on Classroom Practices

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study that examined and reflected on the relationship between the stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of an experienced EAP teacher in relation to teaching second language (L2) reading. The results of this study revealed that the teacher holds specific beliefs about language teaching and learning in general, and teaching L2 reading in particular. What is striking about the results is that many of Luiza’s beliefs and practices may in fact not conflate with what the research suggests about teaching L2 reading and what is being presented in second language teacher education programs about teaching L2 reading. Results suggest the need for EAP teachers to explore the sources of their beliefs and systematically, and regularly, examine their classroom practices through reflective practice in order to monitor their beliefs and classroom practices.

Keywords: Teacher beliefs; reflective practice; L2 reading; English for academic purposes.

Introduction

In recent years the topic of TESOL teachers’ beliefs has received considerable interest in the field of L2 education and became an important focus for research (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Farrell, & Ives, 2014). However, understanding the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and practices is considered a complex phenomenon and messy construct (Pajares, 1992). Indeed, as Farrell and Ives (2014) have noted, beliefs are often held tacitly and teachers and remain hidden to teachers although they have a powerful impact on their practices. Thus research on the influence of beliefs on practices is important if they inform practice and if they are so fixed. So far, however, because of these complexities the research that has been conducted has reported mixed and even contradictory results regarding the correlation between beliefs and beliefs-driven practices. For example, some research has indicated correspondence

between teacher's beliefs and practices (e.g., Kuzborska, 2011), other research has indicated intermittent correspondence where teachers' beliefs are not very consistent with how they teach (e.g., Basturkmen, 2012), whereas other research has indicated lack of this correspondence (e.g., Farrell & Lim, 2005; Basturkmen, Loewen & Ellis, 2004). Despite these contradictory findings, there is agreement that teachers' beliefs are the strongest factors through which teaching behavior can be predicted and heavily affect 'pedagogical decision making' in the classroom (Li, 2013, p. 175). More specifically, teachers' beliefs have a strong influence on classroom practices, such as interaction and communication patterns, decision making, student and teacher roles, materials, goals and procedures (Kuzborska, 2011). Nevertheless, not all teachers are aware of the beliefs they hold about teaching and learning L2 and how those beliefs impact their classroom practice (Farrell, 2015). Thus, helping teachers raise awareness about their own beliefs is crucial for effective teaching and professional growth. The purpose of this paper is to explore through reflective practice the relationship between the beliefs and classroom practices of an experienced ESL teacher in relation to teaching L2 reading, which has not received sufficient attention in TESOL.

Teacher Beliefs

Kagan (1992) defines teacher beliefs as "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (p. 65). Teacher beliefs may be influenced by past experiences as learners (e.g., Lortie's, 1975 apprenticeship of observation), their pre-service education experiences and knowledge, the students they teach at any given moment as well as the school in which they are teaching (Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Walsh, 2006). Teachers' instructional practices are influenced in different ways by these beliefs as they consider methods and materials to provide for effective lessons (Pajares, 1992). Indeed, as Phipps and Borg (2009) have noted, a teacher's belief system may outweigh the contents learned in a teacher education program when it comes to the instruction decisions they make about their day-to-day lessons. That said, not all teachers have the ability to articulate their beliefs (Senior, 2006) and not all beliefs articulate exactly what teachers believe (Basturkmen, 2012) as some beliefs may be held with varying levels of conviction (Thompson, 1992).

Additionally, what teachers say and do in their classroom are governed by what they think and that teachers' theories and beliefs serve as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made. The beliefs teachers hold not only shape teachers' pedagogy but also shape classroom interactions (Li, 2013). During the span of the lesson make several interactive decisions that influence lesson outcomes. This interactive decision-making, as Li (2013) has noted, "Constitutes a major part of teachers' classroom behavior, especially when unexpected classroom events emerge" (p. 176).

Research has indicated that the beliefs teachers hold are not always reflected in their actual classroom practices because of the constraints of classroom reality (e.g., Farrell & Lim, 2005). For example, Farrell and Lim (2005) discovered inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and actual classroom practices when teaching grammar. Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2004) reported incongruence between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in relation to form-focused instruction and suggested that "it may be better to view the stated beliefs of teachers to be potentially conflictual rather than inherently inconsistent" (p. 98). Thus, understanding teachers' beliefs is a complex phenomenon that requires careful examination to help teachers improve their pedagogy and engage in professional growth.

There is a paucity of research conducted on exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices in relation to teaching L2 reading (Farrell & Ives, 2014). From the available literature, findings indicate that teachers' beliefs tend to influence and shape their instructional practices in the reading classroom. For example, in an early study on teaching L2 reading, Johnson (1992) found that the teachers' theoretical beliefs about reading instruction were consistent with their theoretical orientation and literacy instruction in the classroom. In a more recent study, Kuzborska (2011) investigated English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning reading as well as the teachers' instructional practices. The results showed that there was a relationship between EAP teachers' beliefs and classroom practices when teaching reading. The study also revealed that the teachers' beliefs were mostly influenced by their theoretical knowledge, which supports the argument that teachers teach in light of their beliefs.

Despite these few studies that examined teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to teaching L2 reading, there is still not enough knowledge about how teachers' beliefs influences their instructional practices when teaching L2 reading. Furthermore, of the limited available research, there are limitations regarding the data collection methods employed in almost all of these studies as most employed questionnaires and interviews to obtain data about the teachers' beliefs without any follow-up classroom observations to ascertain if there is congruity (or not) between beliefs and practices. The case study reported in this paper is different in that it incorporates such follow-up classroom observations. Therefore, the case study reported here is an attempt to add to literature about the complex phenomenon of teacher beliefs and practices when teaching L2 reading by using several data collection sources triangulated to include classroom observations, interviews and discussions. Additionally, this case study encourages teachers to take part in professional development through reflective practice (Farrell, 2015).

Methodology

This qualitative research was conducted in the form of a case study in order to examine the relationship between an EAP teacher's beliefs and observed classroom practices with regard to second language speaking (Bogden & Bilken, 1982). The study utilized a case study method (Merriam, 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).

Participant

Luiza (a pseudonym) is an experienced (19 years) female ESL English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher. Her education consisted of a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Communication Studies and a diploma in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). Luiza volunteered to participate in this case study as an opportunity to explore her beliefs and practices when teaching L2 reading.

Context

During the time of the study, Luiza was teaching in an EAP language program to prepare non-native English speaking students from several countries for undergraduate studies. The students

were enrolled in five one-hour classes per day. Each class focused mainly on one specific language skill: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and grammar. The observed lessons were conducted in a level 4 reading class. The teacher used the set textbook as the main resource in the classroom and as required by the syllabus.

Data Collection

Data were collected over four 50-minute lessons and the methods utilized included: non-participatory classroom observations, pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews, and a final interview. We conducted four non-participatory classroom observations that were aimed to obtain information on teaching practices. During each observation, the researcher took notes regarding the teacher's behavior and actions during the lesson. All classroom observations were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The pre-lesson and post-lesson interviews were semi-structured and based on questions prepared prior to the interview, but when necessary, additional questions were added as the interview progressed (Merriam, 2009). The pre-study interview questions took place one hour before the class and included questions about her general beliefs about teaching L2 reading, and what she had planned for each lesson. Lesson plans were compared with what actually occurred during each lesson. The post-lesson interviews took place directly after the lessons and the questions included asking the teacher about her thoughts on how the lesson went and whether everything she had planned for the lesson went according to her lesson plan, and if there was anything she would have changed or done differently. The final interview was conducted one day after the last classroom observation in order to elicit the teacher's beliefs about teaching L2 reading. All the interviews with the teacher were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

Data Analysis

This case study attempted to investigate and answer the following research questions:

1. What are the stated beliefs of an experienced EAP teacher in relation to teaching L2 reading?
2. What are the observed classroom practices of this experienced EAP teacher when teaching L2 reading?
3. Are the beliefs the EAP teacher holds about reading consistent with her classroom practices?

These research questions guided the collection and analysis of data. First, the transcribed and analyzed interviews and classroom observations were coded (Merriam, 2009). When all of the observations and interviews were transcribed, they were coded and analyzed. In order to ensure the data were reliable, all of the transcripts were coded and analyzed on four separate occasions by the researchers in order to ensure that the codes were consistently identified (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Once it was concluded that all of the categories were concrete, they were compared with the other types of data (e.g., classroom observation notes) to investigate similarities. Triangulation of data 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 (Luiza) 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).

Findings

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

1. *What are the stated beliefs of an experienced EAP teacher in relation to teaching L2 reading?*

Table 1 outlines Luiza’s stated beliefs about teaching during the interviews. Luiza’s beliefs were divided into the following themes: general beliefs about language teaching, beliefs about teaching L2 reading, and beliefs about language learning.

Table 1: Luiza’s Stated Beliefs

Theme	Stated Beliefs
Beliefs about Language Teaching	help students develop necessary language skills
	help students develop cultural awareness
	incorporate personal experiences
	choice of topic is not a priority
	Use pair work in lessons
Beliefs about Teaching L2 Reading	help develop skills necessary for academic reading
	teach vocabulary
	use a variety of activities in lessons
	encourage students to read closely
	provide additional time to complete activities
	encourage dictionary use
	extensive reading not effective
use target language only	
Beliefs about Language Learning	students responsible for own learning
	provide additional examples and explanations
	explicit error correction
	homework necessary

Luiza expressed several statements regarding her beliefs about language teaching. First, when asked about her role as a language teacher, she responded: “My role as a teacher is to teach all aspects of communication in English and that also includes the cultural aspect, not just the basic speaking, listening, reading, and writing. There is a cultural component, that as a teacher, I feel I need to introduce into the class.” This statement suggests the teacher’s awareness that her role as a teacher is not limited to teaching basic communication skills, but also teaching the culture of the language. Similarly, she believes that her main goal as a teacher is to equip her learners with necessary skills for their future academic career. In regards to the language classroom, Luiza explained that the biggest challenge for her teaching reading is keeping her students involved and participating in class; she expressed: “I find that reading is a little slower pace

and when you have a three page reading in front of you, you are not going anywhere and you have to read it.” Moreover, she stated that teaching reading is more difficult than teaching speaking or grammar because of the difficulty of keeping students’ attention and involvement during the lesson.

Another belief Luiza stated about language teaching was to incorporate personal experiences in the classroom. She believes that incorporating her own or her students’ experiences facilitate learning as it allows them to relate to what they are learning and better understand the concept. Moreover, Luiza also sees incorporating personal experiences as a strategy to show support and empathy.

In relation to teaching materials and topics, Luiza stated that she follows the textbook, but also incorporates authentic reading material in her classroom. Although Luiza explained that she tries to choose topics that might be interesting for her students, she also stated that choosing an interesting topic is not her priority and she does not choose material to “float their [students’] boat.” She expressed: “I do choose topics that would be interesting to them [students], but that is not my number one priority. My number one priority is to get them authentic material to help them [students] learn a skill that they will need for academic reading and for their future.”

Regarding methods of language teaching, Luiza said that she values pair work in the classroom. The above statements represented Luiza’s stated general beliefs about language teaching. Next, we present Luiza’s stated beliefs about teaching L2 reading specifically.

When asked about what the most effective way to teach reading is in her opinion, she responded: “I think the most effective way to teach reading is variety. Variety is key or they [students] get really bored, and I will get bored, too”. Moreover, Luiza added: “In my classes, I want them [students] to have a good time and I want them to enjoy it and sort of assimilate my class into who they are”. In terms of specific reading skills, Luiza stated that it was important for her to stress the value of “reading closely” when learning how to read for academic purposes. She expressed that there is a place and time for the use of strategies, such as scanning and skimming, however, she stressed that it is crucial for her students to understand that academic reading is a complex activity that requires the ability to read closely.

Luiza also stated that teaching vocabulary is important because her students are preparing for being able to read for academic purposes; she explained: “We put quite a bit pressure on vocabulary because we have to get them ready for university and academic reading. I mean, if we don’t put stress on vocabulary, they don’t do it. I don’t think they know which words are important, so we kind of guide them along those lines and then they do it”. Next, we present Luiza’s beliefs about language learning. Luiza also stated her beliefs about providing students with additional time to complete in class reading activities (e.g., related to vocabulary) because as she stated: “I want them to be comfortable.” She also remarked that she encourages her learners to take responsibility for their learning for example by using dictionaries to get the meaning of a word they do not understand in the classroom rather than simply asking the teacher for the answer.

Regarding language learning in general, Luisa said that she holds strong beliefs about students using English only in the classroom. She stated that speaking English is important and necessary for her students because it is the only way they will really learn English. She

continued: “the whole premise of them being here is to learn the language and you cannot learn a language unless you start thinking in the language and using it”.

Luiza also said she believes that homework is an important part of the students taking responsibility for their learning as she stated: “I assign a lot of homework at the beginning of the term, so they can get a good grounding before we start doing some readings where they can apply what they have learned. This is level 4 (high level of proficiency), so they have the responsibility to do homework.”

Although Luiza’s main focus in the classroom is on the reading skill, she said that she believes that incorporating other language skills, such as speaking, listening, writing, and grammar is necessary for effective language learning. Luiza sees language as a whole, which consists of all skills. Therefore, she stated that it is necessary to make use of all the skills in the classroom by integrating them in the classroom activities.

In addition, Luiza also said that she specifically corrects her students’ pronunciation errors in the classroom even though she is teaching a reading class. Specifically, Luiza holds strong beliefs about explicit correction and states that students benefit from direct and explicit pronunciation correction; she said:

I’m big on their ‘*th*’ sounds. I don’t try and fix all their pronunciation because I don’t think anything is wrong with it, but they do have to use their ‘*th*’ and I also emphasize long vowel, short vowel sounds because otherwise, the English ear doesn’t comprehend what is being said

Luiza also pointed out that her penchant to correct explicitly is a result of her past desire to be corrected when she was learning her own L2. She remarked: “I like it. I want to be corrected explicitly.”

Luiza also pointed out that it is necessary to provide learners with real-life examples and experiences they can connect with in order to make the learning process more authentic and related; she said: “I like providing examples from real life and sometimes they will use examples from their life, too, which is really cool when they do that – I love that! That just tells me that they [students] are getting it and they understand when they can apply what they’re reading or what we’re talking about to their own experiences – then I know”. The next section of the paper reports on Luiza’s actual observed classroom practices.

2. What are the observed classroom practices of this experienced teacher when teaching L2 reading?

The second research question sought to answer the following: What are observed classroom practices of an experienced EAP teacher when teaching L2 reading? Table 2 reports a summary of observed practices in Luiza’s L2 reading class.

Table 2: Luiza’s Observed Classroom Practices

Observed Classroom Practices	D1	D2	D3	D4
1. Teacher took up homework at the beginning of class	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Teacher took up activities in a step-by-step process	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Students worked in pairs	✓	✓	×	×
4. Teacher provided additional examples	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Teacher used personal experiences & examples	✓	✓	✓	×
6. Teacher assigned homework at the end of class	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Teacher used humor to maintain learners’ interest	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Teacher incorporated the use of other language skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Teacher encouraged to use English only	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Teacher stressed the importance of reading closely	✓	✓	×	×
11. Teacher used explicit pronunciation correction	✓	✓	✓	✓
12. Teacher provided positive feedback	✓	✓	✓	✓
13. Teacher followed the textbook	✓	✓	✓	✓
14. Teacher incorporated authentic reading material	×	×	×	×
15. Teacher encouraged learners to use dictionaries	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key:

D1: Luiza’s Lesson D1 Lesson: React to the text

D2: Luiza’s Lesson D2 Lesson: Introduction to how to use a dictionary/Introduction of new vocabulary

D3: Luiza’s Lesson D3 Lesson: Book review for extensive reading

D4: Luiza’s Lesson D4 Lesson: Introduction to the concept of main ideas and supporting details

✓ = observed practices × = not observed

We now give some examples (not all) from these four lessons. According to Luiza, the objective of first observed lesson was to introduce a method in the reading process she called ‘react to the text’. Luiza began her lesson with a review of the previous steps of the reading process and an activity which had been assigned as homework. The activity focused on the importance of reading with a purpose. Luiza stated that reading for academic purposes is more than simply scanning and emphasized to her students that if they scan only, they will miss important information. She put them in pairs and gave them about 5 minutes to review their homework activity. After completing the homework activity and taking up the answers, the teacher proceeded to do another activity, which was the new topic for that day’s lesson: ‘react to the text’.

During this activity (and the homework activity) Luzia constantly corrected errors in her students’ pronunciation by using direct and explicit correction. Excerpt 1 below outlines a representative example of how Luiza corrected one student.

Excerpt 1:

- S: Focus on negative thoughts [student does not pronounce the ‘th’ accurately]
L: Say it louder
S: They always focus on negative thoughts [student does not pronounce the ‘th’ accurately] about the future
L: Yeah, they always focus on negative thoughts. Say thoughts
S: Soughts [student does not pronounce the ‘th’ sound accurately]
L: Look at me... Thoughts
S: Thoughts [student pronounces the ‘th’ fairly accurately]
L: Thoughts about the future, right? Okay, number 2.
[Key: L = Luiza; S = student]

In this excerpt, Luiza used direct error correction by modeling to the student how to make the ‘th’ sound. She continued like this throughout the lesson to correct all ‘th’ errors in her students’ pronunciation.

The second observed lesson took place the following day. Luiza explained that her plan for the lesson was first to go over the homework and then introduce new vocabulary and how to use a dictionary. First, the teacher began her lesson by taking up homework, which was focused on the topic of ‘worrying’. The teacher elaborated more on this topic and connected it to her personal experience of moving to another country and her insecurity because of that. She told her students that she used her own experiences of living abroad to show empathy, support, and understanding for their current lives in Canada.

Luiza then introduced and explained the idea of using a dictionary. She introduced ‘Vocabulary Step 1 – Use a Dictionary’ and asked the students to complete various activities which she later took up in a step-by-step process. After taking up answers to all activities, Luiza assigned the last activity for homework and said that she would take it up during the next class. At the end of the lesson, the teacher reminded her students about the book review due the following class. Throughout the lesson, Luiza continually emphasized the use of the target language in the classroom as she kept saying throughout the lesson: “Remember, English only.”

The third lesson focused mainly on the book review assigned previously. The lesson began with the teacher distributing papers for the book review. The students were asked to answer the following questions: What is the title of the book? What is the author’s name? When was the book published? Next, the students were required to write down three new words they learned and the meaning of those words. Lastly, the students had to answer the main question: “What lesson or messages the author is trying to get through to the reader?”

In addition, Luiza incorporated grammar in this activity and asked her students to use two compound sentences and one complex sentence in their answer. She also informed her students that they must underline the grammar structures they want marked. Luiza emphasized the importance of understanding and following instructions and therefore made it clear that, if the students do not underline the grammar structures, she will not mark their work. After she had completed taking up homework, she introduced ‘Vocabulary Step 2 – Learn Word Forms’ and asked the students to complete an activity which required students to fill out a chart with the missing forms of the words from the texts in the chapter. Once all of the answers were taken

up, Luiza assigned another activity for homework, which was based on completing sentences with the correct word from a chart.

Luiza's fourth observed lesson was the following day. The objective of the lesson was to introduce students to the concept of 'main ideas' and 'supporting details'. Luiza emphasized the difficulty of this idea, especially in relation to academic reading. First, she began her lesson by checking answers from previous day's homework and reviewing the previous chapter about the steps involved in the reading process. She then introduced the new concept of 'main ideas' and 'supporting details' by going over the explanation in the textbook. After her explanation, Luiza asked her students to complete various activities which focused on identifying levels of specificity. Similarly to all previous observed lessons, Luiza attempted to make the topic relevant to the students by explaining it to them using real-life examples.

3. Are the beliefs the EAP teacher holds about reading consistent with her classroom practices?

The third research question sought to answer the following: Are the beliefs the EAP teacher holds about reading consistent with her classroom practices? Table 3 presents a comparison between Luiza's stated beliefs and her observed classroom practices.

Table 3: Luiza's stated beliefs and observed classroom practices

Theme	Stated Beliefs	D1	D2	D3	D4
Beliefs about language teaching	Help students develop necessary language skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Help students develop cultural awareness	×	✓	×	×
	Incorporate personal experiences	✓	✓	✓	×
	Choice of topic is not a priority	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Pair work in the classroom	✓	✓	×	×
Beliefs about teaching L2 reading	Incorporate other language skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Help develop necessary skills for academic reading	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Use a variety of activities	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Importance of reading closely	✓	✓	×	×
	Provide additional time to complete activities	×	×	×	✓
	Extensive reading not effective	×	×	×	×
	Use authentic material	×	×	×	×
	Teach vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Encourage the use of target language only in the classroom	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beliefs about language learning	Students must be active learners and responsible for their learning	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Additional examples and explanations	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Explicit error correction promotes learning	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Homework necessary	✓	✓	✓	✓

Key:**D1:** Luiza's Lesson D1 Lesson: React to the text**D2:** Luiza's Lesson D2 Lesson: Introduction to how to use a dictionary/Introduction of new vocabulary**D3:** Luiza's Lesson D3 Lesson: Book review for extensive reading**D4:** Luiza's Lesson D4 Lesson: Introduction to the concept of main ideas and supporting details

✓ = observed practices ✕ = not observed

As table 3 indicates, there are instances where Luiza's stated beliefs both converged with and diverged from her classroom practices. In relation to language teaching, Luiza stated that her role as a teacher is to help her students develop not only basic communication skills, such as reading, writing, speaking and listening, but also to teach the cultural aspect of language learning. It was observed that Luiza aimed at helping her students develop necessary language skills in all her lessons. During the first and second lesson the teacher used pair work to promote listening and speaking. During the third and fourth observed lesson, Luiza incorporated a writing and grammar activity. Luiza explained that her main goal is to equip her learners with the necessary skills that will allow them to be successful in their future undergraduate and graduate studies. In terms of helping students develop cultural awareness, it was observed that Luiza incorporated that aspect in two out of the four observed lessons. In three out of four observed classes, Luiza used personal experiences and examples when explaining concepts to help students understand and relate to the topic. Moreover, during the lessons, it was observed that Luiza practiced reading skills, such as reading closely and finding main ideas and supporting details in the text, which according to Luiza, will help the students when they enter university with their academic reading.

Luiza also stated her belief about not prioritizing the choice of topic but rather focusing more on helping her students develop necessary academic reading skills using the topic provided usually from the textbook. During the observed lessons Luiza did not focus her students' attention on the topic or whether they found it interesting, but rather she emphasized the use of skills that they will be able to use in their future. However, during lesson two, Luiza took advantage of the topic of 'worrying' and incorporated her personal experiences of moving to another country to express her understanding, support, and empathy. She admitted that she wanted to connect with her students by showing them that she understands the difficulties they are currently experiencing because of moving to Canada and being surrounded with a new language and culture.

In terms of Luiza's beliefs about teaching L2 reading, there was both congruity with and incongruity compared to her classroom practices. As observed in all four classes, Luiza incorporated the use of other language skills, such as writing, speaking, and listening. Within her writing activity for an extensive reading activity she also had her students underline grammar structures which she later said that she had to do while learning her L2.

Luiza expressed that her approach to teaching reading is using a variety of activities in the classroom. During classroom observations, it was observed that all of the activities were limited to those she used from the textbook. In addition, although Luiza stated that she provides additional time to complete activities, this was observed only once in lesson four. Connected to this, Luiza also stated that sometimes she brings in some authentic reading materials, but this

was not observed during the four observed lessons where again the only resource she used was the textbook.

In terms of using extensive reading as a way to improve the reading skill, Luiza's beliefs diverged from her classroom practices (see also her use of grammar in this activity above). Luiza stated that although she believes extensive reading can be a useful and helpful reading activity in ESL classrooms, she also pointed out that she does not believe in its effectiveness with her particular group of students. Despite Luiza's belief about the ineffectiveness of extensive reading with this group of students, she still implemented an extensive reading activity in her reading class.

In relation to Luiza's beliefs about language learning in general, she said that she believes using English only in class is extremely important to become a successful learner. Similarly, she emphasized that students should be active learners and take responsibility for their learning. It was observed in all four lessons that Luiza not only strongly encouraged the use of the target language only in the classroom, but also encouraged her learners to be active participants in the classroom. Moreover, it was observed that in all for classes, Luiza provided additional examples to help students better understand an idea or a meaning of a word. She expressed that she believes this is important because it allows the students to relate more to the concept being discussed which, as she pointed out, leads to greater retention.

Another prominent practice observed in all lessons was explicit correction in relation to pronunciation errors, especially the 'th' sound. Luiza emphasized that she encourages her students to work on their 'th' sound, as it plays a significant role in communication. Lastly, she stated her belief about the importance of assigning homework and it was observed that Luiza assigned homework at the end of every observed lesson and took it up at the beginning of class the next day.

Discussion

This case study investigated the relationship between an EAP teacher's stated beliefs and observed classroom practices in relation to teaching L2 reading. Three main themes emerged from her stated beliefs: beliefs about language teaching, beliefs about teaching L2 reading, and beliefs about language learning. Overall, most of Luiza's beliefs converged with her classroom practices. However, in some instances patterns of divergence were observed to be present and several factors could have influenced these patterns.

In terms of congruity between beliefs and practices, Luiza encouraged active student participation, and learning, speaking only in English during reading lessons, and encouraging her students to take responsibility for their own learning. Many of these beliefs and practice can be derived from her own experiences when she was learning her L2 (Korean) as well as her survival methods while living in another country (Korea), so for her, especially insisting on students only speaking English was paramount to not only learning the language but also their survival in a foreign country (Canada). Luiza explained: "They [students] are here to learn English and the best way to learn English is to submerge yourself in it. I learned that when I lived in Korea. The only reason I learned any Korean was because I had no choice and if I wanted to survive I had to use it, so I'm sharing my expertise with them." It is interesting to note the power of these prior learning experiences over what research studies may indicate

about allowing students to use their L1 in the classroom and even Luiza admitted in the interview that she was aware of the theories about using the first language in the classroom that may be useful for learning. Nevertheless, she said that her prior learning language learning experiences were so powerful that she “knows her students should be using English only in the classroom, if they want to learn the language successfully as this was how she learned her L2.” This belief was also reflected in her desire to correct her students’ pronunciation errors as observed in the classroom lessons although these lessons were focused on L2 reading. This strong connection between her prior language learning experiences with speaking only her L2 and being constantly corrected when she made pronunciation errors counteracted her admitted knowledge from research about the positive results of allowing students to use their L1 during lessons as well as the research that suggests a reading class should focus on reading (and not pronunciation). As Richards and Lockhart (1994) have noted, “teachers’ beliefs about learning may...go back to their own experience as language learners” (p. 34).

Some instances related to divergence between Luiza’s beliefs and practices were also noted such as in relation to the materials used in the classroom. Luiza stated that in her reading class, she uses a combination of the material in the textbook and authentic material; however, it was observed that this belief was not visible in her classroom practices. The potential reason for this divergence might have been the requirement of the syllabus at that moment and the program requirements to cover the readings in the textbook. In this case, Luiza’s behavior reflects findings of previous research, which found that language teachers rely on textbooks as a guide for how and what to teach (Senior, 2006).

In addition, although Luiza expressed that one of her roles as a language teacher is to introduce to her students the cultural aspect of language learning, it was observed that only in one class (lesson two) out of four, Luiza spoke about culture. However, the potential reasons for this might have been that the topics discussed in those lessons were not directly related to Canadian culture and lack of time in the classroom to talk about this aspect.

One particular interesting instance of divergence was with her teaching of extensive reading although she stated she did not believe it to be beneficial or helpful activity for her students. Luiza noted that her students “don’t want to do it. They will cheat, copy, whatever, but that’s not my decision, I have to implement that activity, so I do”. So Luiza said that she implemented extensive reading only because she was required to by the syllabus but if it were her choice, she said, “No, I would not.” Luiza noted that extensive reading should be something that the students enjoy because they choose the book but that her students are not mature enough to just read the book. Indeed, Luiza constantly spoke about how her teaching was constrained by the different groups of students she has in her classroom. She suggested that many of the instructional decisions she makes in the classroom are influenced not only by her beliefs, but also by the particular group of students as well as the program’s expectations. Thus, for this particular occurrence, although Luiza stated her belief about the ineffectiveness of extensive reading with this particular group of students, she still carried out this activity in her reading class. The reason for doing so was the program requirement.

Overall, the above discussion suggests that most of Luiza’s stated beliefs were consistent with her classroom practices. Nevertheless, when there was divergence between the stated beliefs and actual classroom practices, the main reason was program expectations or the caliber of students in the classroom. Luiza has acquired some deeply ingrained beliefs about her students

speaking in English at all times, that they have ‘correct’ pronunciation when they speak English, as well as having students underline grammar structures in their written work for an extensive reading activity. What is striking however about the results is that many of Luiza’s beliefs and practices may in fact not conflate with what the research suggests about teaching L2 reading and what is being presented in second language teacher education programs about teaching L2 reading.

Luiza’s many hours learning her L2 in a foreign country is likely the source of these initially tacitly held beliefs and may have remained dormant during her formal TESL Diploma courses but have now become a major force for her in her own classroom practices. Indeed, it has been long understood as Rokeach (1968) has noted, “that some beliefs are more important than others to individuals, and the more important the belief is, the more difficult it is to change” (p. 3). Since language teachers’ beliefs about successful teaching form the core of their teaching behavior, thus it is vital that opportunities be provided for practicing language teachers to articulate and reflect on their beliefs and classroom practices.

We are not sure if Luiza has overtly changed or reinforced any of her beliefs or practices as a result of these reflections as she noted that this was her first time to articulate her beliefs and systematically examine practices when teaching L2 reading. Her beliefs and practices do raise some questions though pertaining to Luiza’s teaching approach and the current approaches to teaching L2 reading that are presented in teacher education and development programs. Some of her beliefs and practices may counter current paradigms being presented in teacher education programs which are usually theoretically based. Yet Luiza’s ‘teaching beliefs’ (rather than teacher beliefs) or what some may call her ‘folk pedagogy’ are reality based and reflect what she sees in her world as necessary for her practice.

Therefore, at the very least we suggest that teacher educators, in both teacher education and inservice teacher development programs had better take into account these ‘folk theories’ (be they correct or not according to current paradigms) when theorizing about the practice of teaching in real classrooms if they want to optimize the impact of teacher education and teacher development programs. Perhaps as Fang (1999) has suggested, teacher educators can “help teachers understand how to cope with the complexities of classroom life and how to apply theory within the constraints imposed by those realities” (p. 59). We believe a first step has been accomplished in this paper as the results have shown, by engaging in reflective practice, teachers (novice and experienced) can begin to articulate their tacitly held beliefs and examine their practices in light of current paradigms that are promoted in the research. All teachers can benefit from reflecting on their beliefs and practices as part of their overall professional development. Ultimately, however, it is up to individual teachers like Luiza to decide whether her teacher beliefs are consistent with her teaching beliefs and practices and provide optimum learning opportunities for her students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the complex relationship between stated beliefs and observed classroom practices of an experienced ESL teacher when teaching L2 reading. The results of the study revealed that both patterns of convergence and divergence were observed. Some of the reasons for divergence included: the caliber of students, the program’s expectations and requirements, and the constantly changing classroom environment.

However, the main purpose of this paper is not to advocate for the best L2 teaching practices (although most—but not all such as correction of pronunciation, underlying grammar patterns in their writing—practices observed seem to be supported by current research in teaching L2 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, and discussions about beliefs and practices all tended to contribute to the exploration of and reflection. Although generalizations from this case study are difficult, we hope that EAP teachers (preservice and inservice) and language teacher educators can become more aware of the importance of teacher reflecting on their beliefs (origins, development) and their classroom practices through engaging in reflective practice. Clearly, more research on L2 reading teaching beliefs and practices is required and on the impact of inservice teacher education on teachers' reading beliefs and practices and we how this study has contributed to our understanding of this complex issue.

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