

A Reflective Study on English Language Learning and Teaching: A Comparison Between an EFL Teacher and an ELA Teacher

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In this comparative self-study, two English teachers, one English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher from China and one English language arts (ELA) teacher in the United States, examined their perceptions of English language learning and instruction. Through a set of documents, i.e., reflective teaching journals, written teaching philosophies, and peer interviews and talks, the narrative study explored and revealed the two teachers' perceptions of English learning process as a learner, English teaching process as a teacher, and how these experiences informed and affected their doctoral practices. Through their reflections on their examined experiences, the study found that the two teachers both used a theoretical lens of social constructivism to guide their perceptions or beliefs. The paper finally gave suggestions on how to improve English instruction from a sociocultural perspective.

Keywords: English language, learning and teaching, mentorship, self-study

Introduction

On a regular Sunday morning, my partner and I were sitting at a Starbucks coffee shop, talking about our new project on English teacher beliefs and practices. As we are from different cultural backgrounds, i.e., I am from China and she is educated in the United States, we were supposed to commence our project through a cultural lens and then share our different experiences. However, having talking about the project for nearly three hours made us realize that, instead of differences, we have too much in common on our journey as English language learner, teacher, mentor, coach, and other titles applied. Therefore, we decide to reposition our project to examine our perceptions of English language learning and teaching and explore how these beliefs informed our journey of doctoral studies.

Review of Literature

Defining Teacher Beliefs

Due to the dynamic, complex, and contradictory nature of the belief system (GAO, 2014a; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2003; Pajares, 1992), researchers hardly reach consensus on the definition of beliefs, thus making it interpreted and used in multiple ways (Borg, 2001). Common themes of the research at its early stage around 1970s included the study of the origins (Lortie, 1975), the classifications (Clark & Peterson, 1986), and more importantly, the affirmative influence of the beliefs on classroom decision-making process (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Nespor, 1987).

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Pajares (1992) defined beliefs as “an individual’s judgment that can only be inferred from a collective understanding of what human beings say, instead, and do” (p. 316). The definition further entails *explicit* and *implicit* beliefs, with the former focusing on what a person can readily articulate (Johnson, 1992) and the latter on what are held unconsciously from actions (Argyris & Schon, 1974; Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, 2001). There are, however, diverged views on defining the *implicit* beliefs, as some studies regard consciousness as an inherent attribute of the beliefs to which the further conscious and unconscious classification is unnecessary or inapplicable (Borg, 2001).

While the consensus is hard to reach in defining the concept of teacher beliefs, it is nowadays referred to as the evaluative propositions generated through cognitive structures that teachers hold un/consciously as true to inform classroom decisions when teaching (Borg, 2001; Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, & Bergen, 2009).

Research on Language Teacher Beliefs and Practices

GAO (2014a) provided a historical review on teacher beliefs and practices through the shifts of the research paradigms, starting from an *emerging* stage which is centered around the positivism camp on the spotted “unidirectional cause-and-effect relationship” between beliefs and practices. Then, the research on the topic came to a *developing* stage in which the relationship between the beliefs and practices are interactive and mutual. Studies at this stage highlighted that beliefs influence actions, and vice versa, embodying the tenets of a constructivism camp. The recent decade has witnessed the studies on the topic in a transformativism camp considering complexity as the key feature of the relationship. Beliefs and practices at this point might be inconsistent due to the dynamic, complex contextual factors (Barcelos, 2006). The theoretical foundation in the transformativism comes primarily from a sociocultural perspective, which is used to explain how beliefs in authentic classrooms inform actual practices (Navarro & Thornton, 2011). Research on language teacher beliefs and practices from a sociocultural perspective, in the future, can be extended in the following topics: (1) belief as mediator; (2) belief and identity; (3) belief change; and (4) belief on specific language knowledge (GAO, 2014a; Kalaja & Barcelos, 2006).

While studies on language teacher beliefs and practices have been conducted for decades, there is still a dearth of literature on the comparison between English language teachers who are English native speakers and those who are non-native speakers of English. Besides, research methods on the topic for the last decades are unbalanced, with substantial research using quantitative method to detect consistency and inconsistency between teacher beliefs and practices (GAO, 2014a). Even within the literature using qualitative approach, researchers tended to bracket themselves and investigate other language teachers’ beliefs. However, self-reflection or reflective practice is necessary and helpful for any language teacher, who expects to gain something meaningful from his/her own experiences and then apply it to his/her teaching (Farrell, 2006; Farrell & Bennis, 2013). Therefore, the present study, through a narrative, reflective lens, explores the two teachers’ perceptions of English learning process as a learner, English teaching process as a teacher, and how these experiences informed their doctoral practices.

Methodology

Researchers as Participants

As this self-study describes two researchers’ own perceptions of English learning and teaching, it is understandable that the two researchers serve as the participants of the study. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce the two researcher participants first.

Yang. Yang is currently a Ph.D. candidate and graduate assistant in a research-based university in the United States. He has also been the president of an education group in China for years. Before he came to the United States, he got his bachelor's degree in Applied English and master's degree in Applied Linguistics in China. His strong interest in the English language and teaching career made him a college English teacher when he graduated with a bachelor's degree. Then, he began his career in English education in Chinese EFL context and changed his roles sequentially from an English instructor to a program director and then to a president. Having taught almost all the levels of students in China, from prek-12 to college students in China, he decided to go the United States for his Ph.D. degree, to improve his specialty from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

Kathy. Kathy graduated in 2014 with her Ph.D. in Literacy/Curriculum and Instruction in the United States from the same university where Yang is currently finishing his Ph.D. She is currently an assistant professor of Literacy and a public university in the Midwest, United States. Before returning for her Ph.D., Kathy taught middle school (grades 6-8) reading and language arts for 10 years on both the west coast and southeast coast in the United States. Her interests include revision in writing, multiple modes of communication, and digital literacy.

Practitioner Research and Self-study

When we think of practitioner research, we immediately consider two connecting phrases: *a way of being* and *agent of change*. The umbrella of practitioner research consists of five major "traditions" but all share the powerful ideology that the practitioner is a "knower and agent for educational and social change" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 37). The tradition of self-study resides in the belief that it is never possible to separate the self from research practices. Moreover, the study of self is focused on the tensions between "theory and practice, research and pedagogy, self and other" (LaBoskey, 2007, p. 818). Cole, Elijah, and Knowles (1998) defined self-study as "being thoughtful—in a Deweyan sense—about one's work" (as cited in Kosnik, 2001, p. 68). According to LaBoskey (2007), "...it is enormously complex, highly dependent on context in its multiple variations, and personally and socially mediated" (pp. 857-858). Engaging in self-study as a methodology allowed us to accomplish two key tenets: (1) It combined our "ways of being" as a teacher researcher and learner with becoming "agents of change" in our thinking and views of ourselves as emerging scholars; and (2) it helped us add to the body of knowledge in the educational field, becoming an "agent of change" in a new fashion.

Data Collection

Written reflection. Data collection consisted of written reflections, also known as nodal moments (critical incidents). They were based on numerous questions we posed to each other as conversation starters. For example, we began our initial meeting with two questions: "How do you define reading?" and "What does the term literacy mean to you?". We individually drafted our responses prior to meeting and then shared our thinking during face-to-face meetings, using these questions as invitations to further investigate deep thinking. We then returned to our individual homes and reflected on how these conversations shaped or influenced our literacy thinking. More importantly, we reflected on how our thinking shared commonalities and differences and how our personal experiences as teachers and learners influenced our thinking. These guiding questions became grounds for us to further investigate ourselves as learners and as teachers, noting shared and separate spaces between these two identities. Individual reflections were posted onto a shared workspace called Google Docs.

During these write-ups, we asked ourselves the following questions that Loughran (2007) recommended: What does the story tell and what purpose does it serve? We wanted to be able to distinguish our beliefs from our realities and written reflections assisted us in this purpose. This narrative inquiry, which we regard as a method of

researching oneself and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), allowed us to make meaning from these experiences. Furthermore, it offered “critical frames for making sense of these experiences, the personal practical knowledge underlying them and their social context” (Kitchen, 2009, p. 38).

Supplementary documents. Apart from the above-mentioned written reflections, we also collected and analyzed supplementary documents including learning diaries or notes and teaching syllabi. Those documents served as the tool to evaluate our stated beliefs in the written reflection. Some of the learning diaries had been kept for years before we started the project and provided us with rich information to consolidate or validate what we had revealed in the written reflection. Teaching syllabi were either from the individual courses we as independent instructors had been teaching during the time of the study or from the courses we used to co-teach as graduate teaching assistants.

Peer talks and interviews. While the written documents accounted for the large percentage of the data collected, peer talks and interviews also in a way support and supplement the data in the study. We, the two researchers, met on a regular basis to talk about their process of writing and peer-reviewed what we had summarized and extracted from our written documents. The process of talking and interviewing served as a way for us to reflect on what we did in the study and what was required to be revised afterwards. Therefore, the data collection in the study included the primary written reflection, supplementary documents and talks, and interviews. All the sources of data contributed to the data analysis of the study.

Data Analysis

Inductive analysis of the data was on-going, constantly informing the progression of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “Data analysis must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases” (p. 242).

Initial open coding of data. While reading our written reflections, we created memos of potential ways to code, noting any instances of themes that emerged (Maxwell, 2005). We ensured that our codes fit the data in a simple and precise manner, seeking out actions (Charmaz, 2006). Data were analyzed line-by-line (Charmaz, 2006), which helped categorize codes, making relationships and patterns visible among all data.

Constant comparative method. Data were also analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). As patterns emerged, they were validated by triangulating the data, comparing each other’s perspectives to our personal perspectives. These patterns and themes were also shared throughout data analysis with a “critical friend” who is an English professor at a nearby university.

In the final phase of data analysis, each written reflection and documented conversations were reread with these themes in mind, seeking out quotes that not only are verified, but could be also used as samples. These quotes were inserted into a word document, separated by themes. Additionally, another word document was created with three columns: two for themes that emerged during data collection from our individual insights and one for our critical friend’s thinking. These were also compared, noting similarities and differences. Furthermore, we drew upon our personal experiences to look for other possibilities of meaning (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Findings and Discussion

Self as Learner

Yang’s reflections of self as learner. Before Yang decided to pursue his PhD degree, he had spent most of his time learning and teaching English in China, an EFL context. When he was in high school, he outperformed

his peers in terms of the English academic achievement, which to a large extent motivated him to apply for an English-major program in college. However, his perception of English learning has undergone a series of changes during approximately 20 years he has been learning English. To be more specific, he viewed English learning as a systematic, static, and structured process when he first started learning English in his primary school, and then regarded English learning as a dynamic communicative and complex process when he moved to the United States for his doctoral study.

English learning as a boring and structured process in primary school. Yang expressed his idea of seeing English learning as static and structured in a great number of his writing pieces. In one of his course papers, which requested him to describe his understanding of learning English as a second language (L2) from an autobiographical perspective, he wrote:

Learning English at that stage (primary school) was simply *an imitating process*, which involved my constant repetition on what the teacher had said. *Boring* as it was, *the sweets and candies* after a good performance were always *attractive* to me. As I was anxious and aggressive to get the candies, I always tried my best to be outstanding. My English learning kicked off with the expectation on candies, but it was simply my *reluctance*. To my great surprise, after several months, I took my first English quiz, and I outperformed others in my score. My teacher *praised* me in class, which seemed *the greatest motivation* for my learning. I began to be self-motivated to learn English well, and found that the boring repetition was no longer boring.

At this stage, Yang saw English learning as something boring and static. Words like “torture”, “boring”, and “reluctance” show how he was not willing to learn the subject matter. However, while Yang was not intrinsically motivated to learn English at that time, he was actually extrinsically motivated to learn. For example, he found sweets and candies “attractive” to him and he always tried his best to “be outstanding” to get those candies.

In addition, in one of his course paper about curriculum studies, Yang expressed how he viewed English curriculum at his primary school as something static and structured:

Teachers parroted what the textbooks said to their students, and students jotted down and memorized all the notes... I remember clearly that I had been taught to read and repeat sentences like “How do you do?”, and “My name is...” for several years, even before I actually knew the meanings of every single word in the sentences. *Curriculum at that time is static and structured.*

Yang explained in this excerpt that how he found himself like a parrot repeating English sentences for memorization, who was typically in a rote-learning style. However, in his later educational experience, he acknowledged the type of learning style. He wrote:

The way I learned English at a very young age is still prevalent in China. I used to doubt the effectiveness when I was studying for my master, but then I realized the importance of input after I read B. F. Skinner’s (1963) experiment and the tenets in behaviorism. Learning is to some extent a process of stimulus-and-response, especially for the child... *Passive as it is, the rote learning is indeed good for build and trigger learners’ learning foundations.*

English learning as a dynamic, communicative and complex process in the United States. Then, when Yang came to the United States to pursue his Ph.D. degree, he changed his perception of English learning completely. He no longer saw the learning process as something boring and static; instead, he began to regard the learning as a dynamic and complex process. In his *teaching philosophy* which has been written in the United States, he expressed his view on learning in some excerpt.

The learning involves *not only* the content knowledge, *but also* the underlying wisdom and applicable methods behind the subject matter. After *integrative learning*, a teacher is in turn suggested to be a *lead learner* (Henderson & Gornik, 2007),

who guides the students to *deep learning*.

While this excerpt conveys Yang's view on learning in general, we figure out that English learning for him at this point has shifted from merely focusing on English as a language per se (content knowledge in his words) to a larger construct that conveys underlying wisdom. *Underlying wisdom* for him leads to *deep learning*. He also acknowledged that learning is integrative and dynamic. Similarly, in one of his excerpts on curriculum, Yang expressed his dynamic view on curriculum.

...My increasing knowledge on my content area led me to regard curriculum as a *dynamic* concept. The more I read and learned, the more blood I input into the field of curriculum... The constant *shifts among different tenets* made my curriculum beliefs *linger around different schools*, thus making curriculum a *dynamic concept*. Years later, I got some resonance with this sort of experience when I went through the credos from a couple of scholars, as Deleuze's (1994) "multiplicity", and Larsen-Freeman's (2008) "complex systems" in SLA..."

To sum up, Yang's viewpoint on English learning has undergone some changes during his educational years in China and the United States. He changed his perception of English learning from a structured and static product to a dynamic, integrative, and complex process. The changed perception might be shaped by a variety of reasons, for example, physical and mental maturity and accumulated knowledge. However, by reflecting on his own and talking with Kathy, he regarded the transnational experience from China to the United States plays a relatively more important role in shaping his perceptions.

Kathy's reflections of self as learner. Reflecting on her childhood and schooling, Kathy believes she has always been an inquisitive person who enjoyed attending school. Her favorite class each year was language arts or English since she loved to read and write; both heavily emphasized in her schooling. It was not until high school when she recognized that she became bored with the English curriculum. Reflecting now as an adult and literacy educator, she realized that it was probably due to a lack of choice in reading selections. Kathy did not understand why she had to read *The Scarlet Letter* as a 13-year-old freshman in high school or *Romeo and Juliet*. Instead, she wanted to read mysteries and thrillers and young adult fiction. However, these options were not available in a school setting. Boredom took over her passion for learning in school. It was not until college and she could select courses that interested her that she regained her love of learning.

The notion of choice has impacted how Kathy views teaching. She purposely entered the teaching profession to give students opportunities to love literacy. This is done through choice, engagement, and invitations to engage in creativity and self-selected ways of representation of understanding. Her most memorable moments in elementary school and middle school centered on engagement with literacy in a creative way and these activities became an integral part of her teaching. Equally important are Kathy's memories of how she felt as a disengaged student in high school, which has impacted what not to do in her teaching as well.

Self as Teacher

Yang's reflections of self as teacher. In his personal teaching philosophy, Yang elaborated on how he viewed a teacher should be someone who is a lead learner and keeps critically thinking and practicing. He quoted Laozi's idea to express why a teacher should be a lead learner.

Chinese philosopher Laozi once said: "give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime" (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 57). Students nowadays are exposed to a non-stop stream of inventions and challenges. If they want to survive and make a living, they should develop lifelong learning ability. Therefore, it leaves teachers a more challenging task: we should guide our students to a world of "how" rather than keep them in a domain of

“what”... embodying what one has learned does not mean directly copy and then hand down the entire subject matter, and the best teaching should be inspiring rather than dogmatizing.

After he explained why a teacher should be a lead learner, Yang continued explaining critical thinking is one of the most important attributes a lead learner should have.

While sufficient practice triggers a teacher's mastery of a certain skill, he or she is still in need of accessing and incorporating different kinds of information into the teaching process. Language teaching has already undergone a series of changes: Back to the 17th century, teaching began with the grammar-translation method, and then switched to the audio-lingual approach in the World War II; when linguistics evolved from Chomsky to Halliday, the teaching pedagogy then steered from the suggestopedia to the communicative language learning. As a qualified ESL/EFL teacher, one should have a good command of all the basic tenets of those teaching methods. Every method has its unique merits and demerits. What we need to do is to analyze our students case by case, and then adjust and incorporate the most appropriate method into the teaching. After years' practice accumulation, we may have an acute sense of the proper methods for our target students and also make ourselves pedagogy-competent.

A story he mentioned in several of his writings also shows how he incorporated critical thinking into his teaching. After Yang had spent one and a half years in the United States, he went back to China to teach a summer session. He spotted some differences between his teaching in China and his teaching in the United States.

I had taken it for granted that my learning and teaching experiences gained from the United States would benefit my Chinese EFL students. However, some techniques or strategies I used to teach during the summer did not work well with the college students I taught. While some students favored my class design, some others thought it was a waste of time to “play” in class, i.e., they were reluctant to be assigned with more activities and reflective time... It turns out that I failed to take one factor, political ideology, into consideration... while China now claims a diversified ideology, it still primarily holds positivism and constructivism in hand. Students are more accustomed to teaching methods that are connected with the rote-learning style instead of some constructive approaches that empower them to learn by doing something.

Yang's process of analyzing his teaching “failure” in the summer session shows how he incorporated critical thinking into his teaching. Besides, it should be noted that the same as Yang's perception of English learning, Yang's viewpoint on English teaching is also influenced to some extent by his transnational experience. His perception of English teaching in China is to a large extent different from the one in the United States.

Kathy's reflections of self as teacher. Kathy's teaching centers on multiliteracies, including writing and revision, multiple sign systems and transmediation (the process of moving thoughts and ideas between and among sign systems), and digital literacy. Introduced by the New London Group in 1996, the term “multiliteracies” expanded communication to include out of school literacies that involve students' culture and dominant language. She conducts her teaching and course work planning through a social semiotic approach toward literacy that includes multiple modes of meaning making (e.g., multiple sign systems), usually with an emphasis on students' out of school literacies. This framework complements multiliteracies because multiliteracies add a new dimension to text formats, creating new literacy expectations. Additionally, multiliteracies shift views of multimodality from print to digital media.

Kathy believes that in order to keep up with trends in literacy, 21st century classrooms must be able to reconsider what it means to be literate for today's youth. She also believes that when students are able to work within a multiliteracies framework, they are more apt to express themselves via intelligence, artistic talent, and imagination. Thus, this framework allows her students to see themselves as intelligent and creative. She adopts a

multiliteracies pedagogical stance on learning as well as integrates a multimodal model of reading whether she is teaching 7th graders or preservice teachers.

One of the first tasks Kathy was asked to complete this past semester at her university was to redesign an undergraduate Foundations of Literacy course to integrate this framework. She purposely and thoughtfully situated the course around students creating and sharing their emerging understanding via digital literacies. For example, students' first assignment for the course occurred on Day 2. They posted a "literacy selfie". The directions were simple: Take a picture of yourself engaged in the act of literacy. This provided excellent pre-assessment opportunities, not only to see their familiarity with technology, but also to gauge their understanding of what it means to be literate. Most students depicted themselves reading a book, which meant she had a lot of work to do this past semester! Before midterms, a student commented in class that he loved learning about digital literacy. He said, "Learning about digital literacies messed with my brain, and I love it. This is the model I identify with for sure!"

Additionally, she invited her preservice teachers to research an International Reading Association (IRA) Hall of Fame member in order to learn more about a particular topic in reading. Students made Tumblrs, iMovies, Wix sites, and Glog posters, just to name a few. They are housed on a shared site called *LiveBinders.com* where they can peruse and have access to each other's work. Students also participated in a weekly online forum in order to create an out of school space for their classroom community.

Since multiliteracies situated the framework for this course, students now understand that "text" is more than print and acknowledge how to teach and "read" various sign systems that make up graphic novels, picture books, etc. Furthermore, multiliteracies offered an opportunity to address relationships among culture, language, and power, which provided rich discussions centering on social justice.

Self as Mentor to Each Other

Yang's reflections. Yang reflected on his teaching and learning process both in China and in the United States and highly acknowledged that peer learning and support is of great importance in his journey. He summarized in three aspects:

First, as a Ph.D. student and researcher, his reading experiences on academic articles have informed him of the importance of member checking in a researcher's writing process. Especially for himself who is more willing to conduct qualitative research, peer's debriefing is by all means an important tool to ensure the trustworthiness of any study. He also conducted a series of research with professors who are quantitative researchers in his school and kept doing collaboration. He noticed that how important it is to do interrater reliability for every coding he and his professors have ever done to ensure a great reliability of a study.

Second, he kept sharing and informing his colleagues who were also in doctoral programs that collaboration is beneficial in several ways. He thought by talking with your colleagues he could always change his understanding on the topic in some nuanced ways, which helped him see things from a multifaceted perspective. An individual's ideas or viewpoints are relatively more limited than a group's.

In addition, from an international background, he learned some American cultural values by communicating with his American peers, which is helpful for him to better understand the American culture. On some occasions, this peer communication helps him test certain hypotheses or correct some stereotypes. For example, the initial purpose of doing this self-study for Yang is to investigate differences between him and Kathy, in terms of perceptions of English learning and teaching. However, after their talks, he then found that there were too many

similarities rather than differences in their ways of thinking about teaching and learning.

Kathy's reflections. Reflecting on her experiences in her Ph.D. program, Kathy realized that the most valuable moments were the ones where she could engage in collaborative efforts learning from her peers and professors who served as her mentors. By participating in research projects and independent studies, she learned how to design qualitative studies centering on literacy and recognized that she and Yang both agreed that learning is not an isolated incident.

Furthermore, Kathy's beliefs in literacy as semiotic in nature as well as multimodal grew from conversations in doctoral seminars and discussions with peers, including Yang. I know recognizing that my teaching pedagogy relies on the belief that there are multiple ways of knowing and expressing understanding. However, prior to entering the doctoral program, I never knew there was a specific name for it. In fact, the notion of transmediation, which is the movement of ideas between and among sign systems, has impacted the way I taught middle school students in the classroom and now continues to grow in my teaching in higher education.

Social Constructivism and Sociocultural Theory Influencing Teacher Beliefs

The above analysis in a qualitative introspective paradigm indicates the social constructivism influences the two English teachers in all three aspects, in terms of their stated beliefs about learning, teaching, and mentorship.

Different from radical or cognitive constructivism, social constructivism emphasizes on the crucial effect from social interaction and individual sharing on the construction of meanings (Bryman, 2001; GAO, 2013a). Numerous phenomenal theories come as embodiments of the social constructivism, among which the representative is the sociocultural theory (SCT). SCT proposes that learning development, embedded within social events, occurs when a learner interacts with other people, objects, and events in the collaborative environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, another representative theory emerged from SCT is that student learning develops from different transmediators, which are typically in the form of or involved with objects, self, and peers/facilitators (GAO, 2013a; Lantolf, 2000).

The essence from social constructivism and its extended theory SCT is revealed in Yang and Kathy's beliefs in terms of their learning, teaching, and mentoring development. In either direct or indirect ways, their beliefs acknowledge the important tenets or components, e.g., critical thinking, scaffolding, transmediators, collaborative learning, that are developed and derived from social constructivism and SCT (GAO, 2013a; 2013b).

To be more specific, in terms of their stated beliefs about the researcher mentorship, both Yang and Kathy in this study reached a consensus on the importance of collaboration in the mentorship. Collaborative efforts made with their peers help the two teachers and researchers improve their teaching and research proficiency. The two researchers particularly acknowledge the benefits from the collaboration with peers in bettering their research methodology repertoire and ensuring the trustworthiness of their works. Their beliefs represent the tenets from the social constructivism.

While social constructivism is developed a step further than cognitive constructivism, it also acknowledges the importance of individual's learning through critical thinking and cognitively internalizing the information. In Yang's stated beliefs about teaching, he highly emphasized on the importance of critical thinking, through his explicit statement on the incorporation of critical thinking into his own teaching and implicit explanation on how critical thinking influenced him to be a lead learner. In Kathy's reflection as a teacher, she showed her focus on teaching multiliteracies or using different semiotic cueing system in her classroom. The way she used is typically an embodiment of scaffolding where student knowledge is potentially developed and guided through other

mediators. For example, Kathy highlighted the successful instruction by guiding students to learn through Tumblrs, iMovies, Wix sites, and Glog posters.

With reference to their reflections as learners, the two teachers found that learner boringness or burned-out come from static and uninteresting curriculum. Different from Kathy who was intrinsically motivated to learn English at an early stage, Yang was stimulated to learn the language with external rewards, such as sweets and candies. However, the two gradually found that the curriculum that deprive of their interest in the English subject was static, inflexible, and over-structured. Similar to Yang, Kathy found the lack of choices in her English curriculum at high school deprived her of interest in learning the subject. The reason that the two teachers as learners gave to explain what might be a great curriculum indicates their constructivist view of learning. GAO (2014b) explained how language ideologies influence the design of curriculum and then affect learner perceptions and development. The static and structured nature of the curriculum that made the two teachers in the study bored of the subject is typically a functional language ideology which emphasizes the decoding process and behavioristic theoretical orientation. On the opposite to the behavioristic orientation lies the constructivist orientation which highlights the importance of constructing meanings through interaction and communication among social events, objects, or persons. However, the evidence to show the two teachers' perception of learning is in some way indirect, compared to those evidences revealed from the teacher perceptions of teaching and mentorship.

Conclusion

Through mapping out our perceptions and beliefs in the journey of learning and teaching English and being involved with in a mentor-mentee relationship among our peers and researchers, we both found the social constructivism has been affecting our way of thinking in multiple perspectives. In terms of our beliefs in defining a great English curriculum, we agreed that choices and dynamics in the classroom play a vital role in motivating our students as learners to learn. Instead of rote instruction which is in a decoding process, we promoted an interactive context through which our students construct meaning on their own. With reference to our beliefs about teaching, we reached the consensus on the importance of developing student critical thinking and using multiple mediators to guide the students to learn. Rather than the instructors or teachers, we prefer to act as the guides or facilitators in the classroom. As for our beliefs about the collaborative relationship with our peers, we acknowledged the positive effects from the relationship which boosts our teaching, writing, and research proficiency and broadens our horizons in the field. Given the numerous benefits we gained from the constructivist theoretical orientation, we advocate teachers in our field to dig deeper in the theoretical repertoire and improve the adjusted practices. Key tenets and concepts in the SCT, including mediated learning experience, collaborative scaffolding, and task-based instruction, are helpful and thus highly suggested to guide our instruction (GAO, 2013a).

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