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*Iranian Journal  
of  
Language Teaching Research*



Urmia University

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## Exploring the Principles and Practices of One Teacher of L2 Speaking: The Importance of Reflecting on Practice

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### ABSTRACT

Teacher principles encompass a teacher's stated assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions about acquiring and teaching a second language (L2). Due to the complex and diversified nature of how principles take form, an individual teacher's principles will influence their judgements, perceptions and instructional decisions, thus affecting the outcome of classroom practices. Exploring teacher principles and their impact on classroom practices and vice versa is an invaluable and necessary component to research in L2 teaching and learning since it plays an influential role in instructional outcomes. This paper explores the nature of the principles/practice relationship through an investigative case study with an ESL teacher of L2 speaking. Additionally, the results of research on principles and practices related to L2 teaching when conducted by academics rarely gets back to teachers in the front lines. Thus the researchers shared their findings with the teacher who as a result of reflecting on the analysis came up with a set of principles she says guides her teaching of L2 speaking.

**Keywords:** reflection; teacher beliefs; L2 speaking; teacher development

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

**Received:** 2 Oct. 2017

**Revised version received:** 23 Nov. 2017

**Accepted:** 1 Dec. 2017

**Available online:** 1 Jan. 2018

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## Introduction

Teacher principles encompass a teacher's stated assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions about acquiring and teaching a second language (L2) (Farrell, 2015). These principles progressively build up over the lifespan of a teaching career and can originate from or be influenced by a variety of sources, including personality (Farrell (2016a)), culture (Mak, 2011), experience as a language learner (Kamiya & Loewen, 2014; Mak, 2011), and experience as a language teacher (Farrell, 2015; Nishino, 2012), among other factors. Due to the complex and diversified nature of how principles take form, an individual teacher's principles will influence their judgements, perceptions and instructional decisions, thus affecting the outcome of classroom practices (Farrell, 2015, 2016b). As Farrell and Tan (2008) explain, the principles that teachers hold are not only complex, but at times they can clash with and influence each other, resulting in varying outcomes in teacher practice.

Thus exploring teacher principles is an invaluable and necessary component to research in L2 teaching and learning since it plays an influential role in instructional outcomes (Farrell, 2015). In addition, in comparison with stated principles, classroom practice reveals the visible behaviours of teachers (Farrell, 2015), and it has been noted that "what teachers say they do and what they actually do in their classes may not always be the same" (Farrell, 2007, p.31). Exploring language teachers' principles and their classroom practices can therefore increase a teacher's awareness of what he or she believes is being reflected in his or her own performance in the classroom (Farrell, 2007). This paper explores the nature of the principles/practice relationship through an investigative case study with an ESL teacher of L2 speaking.

## Teacher Principles

Teacher principles include teachers' assumptions, beliefs, and conceptions of teaching and learning. The nature of L2 teacher principles is complex, not only because they are implicit, but also because they are interconnected. Zheng's (2013) study revealed that no belief is independent or in isolation of the others, and with either a positive or negative relationship. From this one can conclude that to ask a teacher to state his or her beliefs may not be an easy task since it could be difficult to localize each individual assumption, belief and conception they may hold. Additionally, if teachers are able to state their specific assumptions, beliefs and conceptions about teaching, a further complexity is that their actions in the classroom have not always corresponded with these principles (Basturkmen, 2012; Farrell & Bennis, 2013).

Teachers of L2 speaking have a variety of principles, especially because speaking in an L2 requires students to make themselves vulnerable and be more extraverted than what they may be accustomed to (Harmer, 2007). Teachers are aware of students' reluctance to openly share their opinions or personal information in front of others (Harmer, 2007). Thus, teachers of L2 speaking are sensitive to their students and their needs, something which can be accomplished through a continued practice of identifying student needs (Brindley, 1989). This suggests that an L2 speaking teacher takes an active role in assessing, supporting, and making adjustments according to his or her students' changing needs throughout the length of their study (Brindley, 1989).

Not only do teachers of L2 speaking believe they need to be aware of student needs, they also may believe they need to take on the role of 'prompter'. Harmer (2007) explains: "Students sometimes get lost, can't think of what to say next or in some other way lose the fluency we expect of them" (p.347). In such situations, the teacher may be able to help students progress and

minimize frustrations by providing examples or suggestions (Harmer, 2007). L2 teachers of speaking also believe in the use of pair- or group-work to give students opportunities to practice using English. It is believed that by interacting with each other, students are able to learn from each other, negotiate meaning, and adjust output to be comprehensible (Nation & Newton, 2009). Additionally, when planning speaking tasks to use with their students, teachers of L2 speaking carry the responsibility of identifying the knowledge and abilities required of their students to complete the tasks (Goh & Burns, 2012). The teacher should be able to anticipate the outcomes of a communication task (Goh & Burns, 2012), so there is the belief that teachers of L2 speaking need to have awareness of learning outcomes for any speaking task used in class.

L2 speaking teachers also believe they need to be enthusiastic, active, and creative in order to facilitate and encourage participation and engagement from students (Harmer, 2007). Furthermore, in regards to pronunciation, the amount of attention given to this component of speaking often depends on the teacher and his or her attitude toward it, as well as how in-depth they choose to explore it (Nation & Newton, 2009). Some teachers may believe that it is a skill requiring instruction centralised on form through practicing and repeating, or that pronunciation is a structure of knowledge requiring a focus on meaning in order to mature and develop (Nation & Newton, 2009). Therefore, the beliefs held by L2 teachers of speaking as well as the degrees to which these beliefs are held are various and unique to the teacher.

The end goal of speaking effectively in an L2 requires learners to integrate language and discourse knowledge with speaking skills, resulting in output which is both accurate and fluent in various speaking contexts (Goh & Burns, 2012). It is not an easy task to ensure that all areas of speaking acquisition are nurtured adequately and appropriately in a classroom, and there is a lack of consensus on the ways to approach speaking instruction. As Goh and Burns (2012) point out, there are benefits and limitations to various approaches including the direct approach, which focuses on accuracy of structure and linguistic forms, and the indirect approach, which is primarily centralised around fluency (Burns, 1998). An integration of these approaches is believed to be an ideal structure to follow, however classroom practices have led to the belief that these approaches are mostly in isolation from each other (Goh & Burns, 2012). Another belief about teaching L2 speaking is whether or not to push output. The comprehension approach supports the idea that students need to have an adequate understanding and experience with the language system before pushing them to speak (Nation & Newton, 2009). In contrast, there is the opposing viewpoint that pushing learners to speak will aid them in acquiring knowledge about the language system (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Considering the breadth of teacher beliefs and general beliefs about teaching L2 speaking, the value of this case study is all the more evident. Exploring the beliefs of teachers of L2 speaking is one way to gain a better understanding of the approaches that are currently regarded as beneficial in speaking instruction and additionally, whether or not these beliefs are practiced in the classroom. Thus, this case study attempts to further the understanding of teaching L2 speaking as well as the belief/practice relationship of this skill with the help of one ESL teacher of L2 speaking.

## **Methodology**

For the purposes of investigating the relationship between the principles and practices of an L2 teacher of speaking, qualitative research took place in the form of a case study. This approach was selected to gain an in-depth and naturalistic perspective on the teacher and her instruction in the

classroom. Case studies are often found in applied linguistics research (Perry, 2011), and have proven to be successful in furthering comprehension of second language teaching (e.g. Farrell, 2013c; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

### *Participant*

Sasha (a pseudonym) is a female ESL teacher in a language program at a Canadian university. She has a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in Applied Linguistics and had been working for approximately six years as an ESL teacher in a university English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at the time this research study took place. Sasha had expressed an interest in participating in professional development. The researchers were able to provide Sasha with such an opportunity by taking a deeper look into her beliefs and practices of teaching speaking.

### *Context*

This study took place in an EAP language program which aims to prepare learners for post-secondary education at a Canadian university. Students are placed into the program according to their English abilities, and then study for 5 hours every weekday to advance in their English reading, writing, grammar, listening, and speaking skills. This study focused on Sasha's beginner L2 speaking class which consisted of 13 students from a variety of countries. Sasha was provided with a curriculum plan and course textbook to aid in instruction.

### *Data Collection*

Several methods of data collection were employed to obtain evidence for this study including classroom observations, interviews and journal writing. Over a two-week span, data was collected from five one-hour classroom observations along with 15-minute interviews which took place before and after each observed lesson. The observer utilized the pre-interviews to gain a sense of the teacher's lesson plan for that day's class, as well as to see the teacher's thoughts and expectations on the lesson outcomes. The post-interviews focused on the outcomes of the lesson to gain a deeper sense of what had happened and why. These interviews occurred directly after the class observations. A day after the final observation, data was also obtained from a 30-minute follow-up interview. The purpose of this interview was to have Sasha explicitly state and explain her beliefs about teaching L2 speaking. This interview was selected to take place after rather than before observations so as to have as little influence on Sasha's teaching. All interviews used for this study were audio recorded and then transcribed.

All of these observations and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed (Perry, 2011). Sasha also agreed to write her opinions about her teaching at the end of each day to serve as a journal entry. Sasha was free to write as little or as much as she wanted in response to the questions or any additional thoughts she may have had.

### *Data Analysis*

The purpose of this study was to explore possible answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the stated principles of a teacher of L2 speaking?
2. What are the practices of a teacher of L2 speaking?
3. What is the relationship between the teacher's stated principles and actual classroom practices related to L2 speaking?

Although this study was exploratory in nature, these questions helped lead the gathering and analysis of the data. All verbal data from the interview and observation transcriptions, as well as the teacher reflection entries, were gathered together, analysed for patterns and themes, and then coded. In order to test the plausibility of the patterns, the researchers took several steps. The data was approached and discussed by the researchers on several occasions to ensure there was agreement on coding selections. Additionally, data triangulation was utilized to confirm the presence of the same data patterns from varying sources (Perry, 2011). As stated by Perry (2011), weight or credibility can be added to an argument by gathering evidence from differing sources. Thus, data from the observation, interviews, the final post interview, and the reflections from both the researcher and Sasha were utilized to solidify pattern interpretations.

## Findings

The following findings are organized as answers to the study's guiding research questions.

### 1. What are Sasha's stated principles about teaching L2 speaking?

Table 1 outlines Sasha's expressed principles pertained to varying areas of the teaching/learning process. They were organized according to three themes: language teaching, teaching L2 speaking, and language learning.

Table 1  
*Sasha's Principles*

Theme	Belief
Language Teaching	Incorporate a cultural component in the class Build confidence and motivation Fulfill student expectations of the class and teacher Allow for spontaneity and flexibility in teaching plan Be sensitive to students' abilities and needs
Teaching L2 Speaking	Promote vocabulary development Focus on sentence structure
Language Learning	Harmonious and cooperative classroom Need a sense of security and trust

Regarding language teaching in general, Sasha expressed various principles, the first of which being that an ESL teacher should incorporate a cultural component in the class. Sasha mentioned before one of her lessons that as an ESL teacher she takes on the role of cultural expert; she stated "Hopefully today my role is for them to see me as a culture expert." Next, Sasha expressed that it was her duty as a teacher to build her students' confidence in and motivation for language learning. Sasha mentioned: "I believe that teaching speaking, at the core of it all, is just to help learners feel confident... I don't want to be the person to bring their confidence down. You know I am trying to build, build, build." Another teaching belief of Sasha which appears to have a significant influence on her daily lessons is that she focuses on fulfilling her students' expectations of the class and of her as their teacher. She explained:

I want to make them happy. I want to provide them with a happy, positive learning experience, so their expectations on me are crucial. Whatever their expectations are, my goal is to always fulfill them or meet them or exceed them, but never to be below their expectations.

Sasha also explained that she feels in language teaching, spontaneity and flexibility with the lesson plan are welcomed. When certain tasks took longer than planned in the class, Sasha explained that she did not want to “disrupt their creative flow.” Additionally, she said that she believes that even when the class is getting off topic, she will ‘ride the wave’ and encourage them to speak because they are engaged and speaking, which is her end goal. Another of Sasha’s language teaching beliefs she mentioned is that teachers need to be sensitive to their students’ abilities and needs. She explained:

Certain things I try to understand first before I demand something of them or before I jump in and try to push them to speak. For example, if a student is shy and I can see that they are struggling, I will either approach them and join their discussion, and prod them, lead them, and then once I feel that they are ok in the group setting, I will walk away.

This example illustrates Sasha’s awareness for her students’ abilities with tasks they work on in the class as well as her being needed as a guide and supporter by her students.

Regarding teaching L2 speaking specifically, Sasha has two main principles. The first one she stated is that vocabulary development needs to be continually promoted. For example, for a task in which students had to make a list of materials which were needed to make something, Sasha said that she pushed her students to try to create a list of materials of something they were less familiar with so as to help them learn new vocabulary. She expressed that “I saw it as an opportunity for them to learn more than just the easy ones.” Sasha’s second principle is that when teaching L2 speaking, she believes that students need to focus on their sentence structures, specifically using complete sentences. She said that this is especially important since the students tend to revert to using simple one-word answers when they are talking amongst themselves.

In terms of language learning, Sasha expressed that two components are necessary in an L2 speaking class. First, she said that a harmonious and cooperative classroom is best to help the students with their learning. In addition to a cohesive class, Sasha also stated she believes students need to feel a sense of security and trust when learning a language. Sasha explained:

My approach is always to first, gain their trust, that I will not be judgemental, that I will not be critical, only constructively, and I approach it very delicately in lower levels because speaking is a sensitive matter and a source of insecurity for a lot of our students, ah for any English student actually.

As Sasha expressed, language learning can create insecurities for learners, so she explained that gaining their trust and being aware of those insecurities will help students during the process of learning ESL.

## ***2. What are Sasha’s classroom practices?***

Table 2 outlines Sasha’s observed classroom practices.

Table 2  
*Sasha's Practices*

Observed Practices	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
Teacher reviews previously learned material	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Teacher checks for student comprehension	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher includes a cultural component	N	N	N	Y	N
Students work together (in groups or pairs)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher gives students positive reinforcement and encouragement	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher uses humour and enthusiasm	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher is flexible with time taken to complete activities	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Teacher aids in developing students' vocabulary	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher reminds students to use complete sentences	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher uses a PPT	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher directly asks individual students for answers	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Teacher makes changes to daily lesson plan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teacher and students engage in random conversation at the beginning of class	Y	Y	N	N	Y

D = Day of observation; Y= Yes, observed; N=Not observed

As shown in Table 2 above, Sasha exhibited varying classroom practices, many of which could be seen across all five of the observed lessons. In every class observed, Sasha checked for her students' comprehension, had students work together in either pairs or small groups, gave students positive reinforcement, exhibited humour and enthusiasm, focused on helping develop vocabulary skills, reminded students to write and speak in complete sentences, used a PowerPoint presentation (PPT), and made changes to her daily lessons during the class. Practices which were observed in all but one class were reviewing previously learned material and being flexible with time taken to complete activities. She was only observed incorporating a cultural component in one of the five observed classes. Additionally, the first 2 days of observation, Sasha did not call on specific students to give answers, but the next 3 days she addressed students by name. Lastly, the first 2 days as well as the last day, Sasha spent approximately 10-15 minutes of the beginning of the class engaging the students in discussion on random topics; however for days 3-4, any discussion that took place was related to topics in the lesson plan.

### ***3. What is the relationship between Sasha's stated principles and her classroom practices related to L2 speaking?***

This section compares Sasha's stated principles about teaching L2 speaking and her observed classroom practices. Table 3 illustrates how these were or were not observed on each of the 5 observed teaching days. In general, Sasha's principles converged with her practices, although there are some instances of divergence.

Table 3  
*Sasha's Principles and Classroom Practices*

Theme	Belief	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
Language teaching	Incorporate a cultural component in the class	N	N	N	Y	N
	Build confidence and motivation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Fulfill student expectations of the class and teacher	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Allow for spontaneity and flexibility in teaching plan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Be sensitive to students' abilities and needs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Teaching L2 Speaking	Promote vocabulary development	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Focus on sentence structure	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Language Learning	Harmonious and cooperative classroom	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Need a sense of security and trust	Y	N	N	Y	Y

D = Day; Y= Yes, observed; N=Not observed

In terms of language teaching, Sasha expressed that she thinks a cultural component is important since students came to Canada desiring more than just how to make a presentation; however a cultural component was only obvious in the 4<sup>th</sup> observation when the lesson plan was focused on teaching the students about a Canadian holiday. Sasha also stated the importance of building students' confidence and motivation while teaching ESL and this belief was observed in all 5 days. Additionally, Sasha stressed the importance of meeting her students' expectations of her and the class; however this belief was difficult to observe since we were not aware what these expectations could be. The only expectation which Sasha made apparent during the observed classes was that she felt her students wanted to be entertained, thus resulting in Sasha expressing the need to be humorous and enthusiastic, a practice observed across all 5 observed lessons. Sasha also mentioned that she believes it is important to be accepting of spontaneous occurrences in the class, which for example, could take form in random discussions with students. She said that instances like these should be accommodated, thus resulting in her use of a flexible teaching plan. This behaviour was seen in all 5 observations as well. Lastly, Sasha mentioned that she thinks it is important to be sensitive towards students' abilities and needs. This was again a challenging belief to observe since we, as observers, do not know the students' capabilities or needs. However, there were instances in which it was apparent Sasha was attempting to meet needs and match abilities. To illustrate, on the first observation day, Sasha displayed a table in a PPT which demonstrated for the students the things they did well on their previous presentation, as well as areas for improvement. This demonstrated that Sasha was aware of their presentation abilities, and that the students would need to know how they could improve for next time. In addition to this, Sasha always monitored the students' progress as they were working on assigned tasks, and frequently asked students questions to confirm comprehension.

In relation to teaching L2 speaking, Sasha expressed the importance of nurturing vocabulary development. Whether the vocabulary pertained to their upcoming presentation or it was being used in passing, Sasha took the time to draw attention to unfamiliar words, writing it on the board, repeating it for pronunciation purposes, or giving a verbal explanation in all 5 observed lessons. Sasha also expressed the belief that speaking teachers should pay attention to sentence structures. During all observed lessons, she was seen reminding students to use complete sentences or to include specific structures in their sentences when completing activities.

Table 3 also shows that Sasha's principle about maintaining a harmonious and cooperative classroom converged with her observed practices. She had students constantly working together, she provided opportunities for them to learn about and from each other, and she intercepted when she felt there were any problems with group dynamics. Lastly, one of Sasha's most emphasised principles was that students need to feel they are secure and can trust their teacher. This principle was difficult to observe since it was hard to judge students' insecurities. It was only



in 3 of the 5 observed lessons that it was obvious to the observer that Sasha was attempting to quell any specific student anxieties. For example, on the first day when students needed to complete a self-evaluation about their presentation performance, Sasha repeatedly reassured her students that their evaluations would not impact their marks. She explained that even if they gave themselves a low mark, that wouldn't change the marks she would give them. It was clear from this explanation that she knew her students may have felt uncomfortable being honest if she had not emphasised their ability to trust her.

Classroom practices which Sasha had not expressed during interviews were also observed. One such practice was building on knowledge learned from each day by reviewing and making connections. Near the start of every class, Sasha would ask the students either general questions such as 'What did we do yesterday?' or more specific questions such as 'Who can tell me what is a skill?' By doing this, Sasha was able to test retention of knowledge as well as to bring awareness to the connectivity of material covered. This practice was observed in all observed lessons except for in the 4<sup>th</sup> one, which is understandable since a new topic was the focus of that class.

Another observable practice which Sasha did not express during the interviews was the use of schema activation in her language teaching. This took place when Sasha introduced new concepts or topics of conversation and was observed in each lesson. Excerpt 1 below is an example from the first day which captures the depth that Sasha takes in activating schema. The students had just finished working on their self-evaluations, and then Sasha wanted to redirect the lesson by shifting focus on a new topic:

*Excerpt 1*

T: Ok, if you are not finished, don't worry. You can give it to me tomorrow. For now, just turn your attention over here. Ok, unit 5 is about, it's called 'I'll show you how'. So, what do you see in these pictures? (*T shows different actions people are doing on the PPT*). What do you see?

S1: Cooking.

T: Cooking. Very good. Do you know how to say the second one?

Ss: Circus

T: Circus, oh good, that's where they work maybe. This action (*T imitates*). It starts with a 'j'. Juggling. Can you do this? Anybody?

*[T continues to check Ss knowledge of different actions shown in the PPT]*

T: Ok, so, our unit is going to talk about these things. About skills and talents. So, are any of these...do you know what a skill is? Skills? How about a talent. Ok, tell me what is a talent?

S2: *inaudible*

T: Something you do very well? Ok, good. Does anyone know anything else about a talent?

S3: Something you know when you were born.

T: Very good, wow, I wasn't expecting you to know. Very good. Good, talent. When you were born, maybe you had this already. Ok? Can you give me an example of a talent? Maybe you have or some...

S4: S1 has a cooking

T: Cooking talent? Interesting.

S1: Just often

T: Oh you cook often, haha wow. Very cool. A man who likes to cook. That's exciting. Haha. Ok, how about, so ok keep that example in your mind. How about talent? Another talent. Someone you know, or do you have a talent?... Or someone famous?...Any ideas?...Who is your favourite singer? K pop? J pop? Nobody? Haha...ok how about I give you a Canadian. Celine Dion. Titanic?

S: Ya

[notes: T = Teacher; Ss = multiple students; S1 = a specific student]

From the details in Excerpt 1 that mimic all the other lessons observed, we can say that Sasha considers schema activation important when teaching L2 speaking since she created a PPT with pictures to introduce skills and talents, and then uses examples with students from the class to help with the introduction to possible new material. However, it is also interesting to note that she never stated this principle in any of her interviews.

## Discussion and Implications

Overall, the findings from this study indicate that Sasha's stated principles about teaching L2 speaking mainly converged with her classroom practices. There could be several reasons to account for this convergence. Firstly, when asked about her overall approach to teaching speaking, Sasha expressed that she should gain her students' trust by not being judgemental, being sensitive to her students' insecurities, and building confidence. Since these principles are more abstract, it was more challenging to isolate them in the observations, but evidence of these beliefs was apparent in her actions throughout the study. Sasha attributes this approach to her upbringing, since she observed and heard her parents express the struggles they had moving to Canada and learning English. She said: "They were always self-conscious whenever they had to speak, in any situation. This has shaped who I am in the classroom because I think that everyone has a different reason to learn and speak English". In addition to this, Sasha also shared: "I feel, just my personality maybe or my experience with students approaching me and saying how terrified they are or how nervous they are has really made me aware that it [speaking in English] is a very sensitive area." Thus Sasha's upbringing, personality, and teaching experience all seem to contribute to her teaching L2 speaking.

Although Sasha's principle about allowing for flexibility and spontaneity converged with her practices, we did notice less flexibility on day 3 of the observations. During the pre-observation interview, Sasha mentioned: "I made lesson plan restructuring because we were kind of behind on our plan, so I made a PPT to stay on track, to stay organized, and I took out things on the plan that I didn't think were necessary anymore." During the observation, Sasha did not start the class talking about random topics with the students, something which was observed the previous 2 days. As well, she was firmer with timing expectations of her students when completing tasks. Then, in the post-observation interview, when asked to give any insight on the day's lesson, Sasha expressed: "We are either rushing or seems that the design isn't to spend a lot of time nurturing something." It is apparent that Sasha struggles with ownership of her class since she has a pre-determined timeline to follow, and she expressed as much in the post-interview about her beliefs:

In this situation, in this program, I have a curriculum to follow, and that's my job. Otherwise I would incorporate more outside influence. I would bring guest speakers in. I would bring conversation partners in. I would give any chance to speak and build their confidence.

This inability to add personal touches to the long-term plan could also be a reason for the divergence observed in relation to Sasha incorporating a cultural component in class. Sasha mentioned that she would like to incorporate more about culture in the future; however, it appears that the focus during the observations was to prepare for the next presentation. Although we were only with Sasha's class over a 2-week span and that every week may not be so heavily focused on presentations, it appears that the curriculum does not allow for too much flexibility.

When comparing the results with what the literature on L2 speaking suggests, we believe that this case study offers several insights for both teacher educators and language teachers. Firstly, in relation to a teacher's sensitivity towards their learners, Goh and Burns (2012) characterize a teacher of L2 speaking as one who has awareness of their students' learning needs and the pressures they feel when speaking in their L2. Sasha's observed practices indicate that she displayed sensitivity towards her students which helped her make unexpected changes in order to benefit them. For example, on the fourth observation day Sasha's plan was to watch an instructional video and have the students take notes on the steps; however near the beginning of the video, Sasha realised the original plan would be too taxing for them, so she stopped the video several times to help them catch the key points. This illustrates her ability to see her learners' needs and to make the appropriate changes to satisfy those needs.

When providing students with input, scaffolding, and feedback in L2 speaking classes, Goh and Burns (2012) suggest that teachers of L2 speaking be active intervenors. Sasha was observed on several occasions providing students with such support as she often circulated the room while students were completing exercises in order to get a sense of their progress and if any help was needed. Excerpt 2, taken from the first observed lesson, illustrates such an occurrence. Sasha had just completed instructing students on how to complete the self-evaluations about their presentations, and was in the midst of circulating when this conversation took place between her and a student:

*Excerpt 2*

T: Do you need help? Oh, this one? ... Do you think, what do you think you did very well? For example, you have good PPT, or your voice was loud...oh, you don't think so. Ok, haha. So what do you think, I know.

S1: inaudible

T: You want to ask?

S1: I saw my classmates PPT very beautiful, but mine.

T: Oh, that's ok. How about your voice, your speaking? Or body language? Did you look at everybody?

S1: Ya

T: Did you look at everybody? Ok, so maybe that is one thing you did. Good.

[notes: T = Teacher; Ss = multiple students; S1 = a specific student]

From excerpt 2, various purposes for intervening are apparent. Sasha noticed her student was struggling, intervened, provided support by giving examples of presentation components, gave the student reassurance, and then provided the student with positive feedback when he or she came to an answer. This example is one of many observed throughout the 5 observation days in which Sasha was actively intervening.

Sasha's principle and observed practice of building students' confidence is a shared concern for other teachers. Similar to Sasha's feelings, teachers know the level of anxiety students feel speaking in front of others, especially native speakers, in their second language. It is suggested that one way for teachers of L2 speaking to nurture confidence and reduce anxiety is to familiarize students with the manner of speech used by native speakers (Heng, Ain Nadzimah, & Nurkarimah Binti, 2012). By providing students with ample opportunity to speak with herself and other classmates in English, as well as utilizing positive reinforcement, Sasha has created her own methods for boosting her students' confidence when speaking in English.

Sasha's views on teaching speaking are similar to those of many other ESL teachers of L2 speaking, and this teaching stance is similar to an indirect (transfer) approach, which is concerned with speech fluency (Burns, 1998). This approach is based on providing students with opportunities to speak, with the assumption that these communicative activities will allow transfer of skills to real-world contexts (Goh & Burns, 2012). The literature states that this approach does have limitations as it is not adequate to only promote talking, since the likelihood of learners acquiring new skills and language is minimal due to a lack of contextual and linguistic knowledge (Goh & Burns, 2012).

Although Sasha practiced a focus on language use and went to great lengths to make sure her students were practicing their speaking, she did not disregard focusing on lexical components within class, an approach known as the direct (controlled) approach (Burns, 1998). She shared that amongst language specific speaking skills, she focuses on her students speaking in complete sentences and learning new vocabulary; both of these beliefs were practiced on all five observation days. However, this direct approach was only limited to vocabulary and sentence structure, and often there was not a strong emphasis on these aspects of speaking. Some experts have suggested that striking a balance with the direct and indirect approaches is a more desirable outcome for an L2 speaking class (Littlewood, 1992). Unfortunately, the use of these approaches may not always lie in the hands of the teachers, as they can be influenced by the curriculum and textbooks determined by language schools (Goh & Burns, 2012). Upon closer inspection of Sasha's assigned course book, we made note that each unit is centralized around a common theme with little support from theoretical ideas. If teachers are required to learn about their students' needs from not only personal observations, but also from theoretical principles (Goh & Burns, 2012), then Sasha's textbook fails to meet both her and her students' requirements. Additionally, when asked about the role that pronunciation plays in her speaking class, Sasha explained that it is not part of the curriculum. As well, teachers of L2 speaking are unable to draw reference to a specific model for instruction of L2 speaking, unlike other skills such as L2 reading and writing (Goh & Burns, 2012). It is apparent that pre-determined curriculum and materials, as well as a lack of instructional guidance, creates constraints on L2 speaking teachers and their instruction.

The purpose of examining language teacher principles and classroom practices is not to look at or for 'best practices'; rather, the idea is to see what is happening rather than what a teacher thinks is happening, so teachers can become more confident knowing that what they believe about language teaching and learning is being reflected in their classroom practices (Farrell, 2013a,b). Although the results indicate that Sasha was able to express several of her teaching beliefs, it is not always easy for teachers to articulate them, and it is possible that some of Sasha's beliefs were in the process of forming and thus difficult for her to explain (Basturkmen, 2012). Articulation of principles could also be attributed to a teacher's degree of participation in actively exploring what they believe they do in the classroom; if a teacher does not consciously reflect on his or her beliefs, then those beliefs are not brought to a level of awareness (Farrell, 2015). Therefore, teachers should be encouraged and provided with opportunities to engage in personal reflection of their principles (i.e. assumptions, beliefs and conceptions of learning and teaching). Reflection has shown to be beneficial for teachers in exploring their teaching beliefs (Farrell, 2013b; Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Farrell & Ives, 2015; Sibahi, 2015). By doing so, they can be aware, make connections to the origins of their beliefs, assess if they agree with these beliefs, and then make any necessary changes to reflect their intended practices (Farrell, 2015). However, the results of research on principles and practices related to L2 teaching when conducted by academics rarely gets back to teachers in the front lines.

In this vein we shared the above findings with Sasha after we completed the analysis and asked her for her reflections on our analysis and she said that her first reaction was surprise to 'see' her reflections as she had never systematically reflected on any aspect of her principles or practices before. Then she noted that after reading all again she realized that she has changed as a teacher.

Sasha said she realized: "I have evolved past expectations of what a teacher should be - more than ever now. I'm comfortable being me more than ever." She reflected that overall as a teacher when you stand there alone, you have to be authentic." Regarding her teaching of L2 speaking she noted that she has re-evaluated her principles but cannot say which one is more important but that the following are for her (but in no particular order):

- Provide a comfortable atmosphere for example: ground rules, respect, and confidence building.
- Choose topics/activities based on student interest levels.
- Leave room for error and spontaneity.
- Not a typical class - less teaching and more feedback - student-led.
- Organize by levels 1-3 focus on accuracy, complete sentences, rapport; levels 4-5 focus on complex topics, idioms.
- Do anything to get them speaking English as much as possible! Whatever works!

Sasha did not elaborate on any of these but she says now that she has articulated them again and in light of the reflective process she has gone through with discussion, observation and writing, she is more aware and conscious each day before, during and after teaching. Thus through reflection teachers are able to gain awareness of their principles, are able to better understand what they are doing in the classroom and why, and it can also aid in clarifying changes that may need to be applied to their teaching and learning methods over time (Farrell, 2015). It seems also that some kind of feedback may be a necessary prompt for practicing teachers in order to inspire them to reflect and evaluate their beliefs and practices to see if any adjustments are appropriate for their own betterment as teachers, as well as for their students' learning opportunities.

One limitation of this case study is that there was only one participant and as such makes generalization of the findings difficult. However, as Flyvberg (2006, p. 227) has eloquently stated, "knowledge that cannot be formally generalized can still enter the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society." In other words, case studies that do not attempt to generalize still offer value to such a process, and we believe that language teachers can learn about the importance and method of comparing their own beliefs of L2 speaking with their actual classroom practices through reflection.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to explore the relationship between one ESL teacher's beliefs and classroom practices of L2 speaking. Through an exploration of data from a variety of sources, our findings demonstrate that the teacher's classroom practices are a strong reflection of her professed beliefs. Although we observed mostly convergence of beliefs and practices, there were instances of divergence as well as an absence of expressed beliefs which were practiced by the teacher. This indicates the importance of teachers engaging in a reflective exploration of their own beliefs and practices; as Farrell (2016b) has noted, "language teachers should be encouraged to consciously reflect on their teaching beliefs because these are the driving force behind many of their classroom actions" (p. 3). The combination of talking and writing about their beliefs and practices as well as engaging in classroom observation all seem to contribute to their exploration of their beliefs and practices concerning teaching L2 speaking, one of the main purposes of this

study. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will act as a catalyst for encouraging English language teachers to reflect upon their use of questions (and other aspects of their teaching) because there is a need to articulate tacitly held beliefs so that teachers become more aware and have a better understanding of how their beliefs impact their classroom practices.

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