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Exploring the Professional Beliefs of an EFL Teacher: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The applied science model of teacher education implies that the relationship between theory and practice is unidirectional. In this study, however, the researchers make a case in the opposite direction, i.e., they believe that professional practice can also shed some light on theories of language teaching. Since narrative inquiry is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life, the researchers took it as a legitimate mode of research to uncover and make sense of the professional experience of an experienced and professionally popular language teacher. Analysis revealed six themes, which reflect the participant's professional beliefs. Among other things, she believes that optimizing teaching practice depends on maximizing learner involvement, focusing on responsive teaching, leaving room for practice, and personalizing practice. The study has clear implications for practitioners and teacher educators.

Keywords

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Exploring the Professional Beliefs of an EFL Teacher: A Narrative Inquiry

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The applied science model of teacher education implies that the relationship between theory and practice is unidirectional. In this study, however, the researchers make a case in the opposite direction, i.e., they believe that professional practice can also shed some light on theories of language teaching. Since narrative inquiry is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life, the researchers took it as a legitimate mode of research to uncover and make sense of the professional experience of an experienced and professionally popular language teacher. Analysis revealed six themes, which reflect the participant's professional beliefs. Among other things, she believes that optimizing teaching practice depends on maximizing learner involvement, focusing on responsive teaching, leaving room for practice, and personalizing practice. The study has clear implications for practitioners and teacher educators. Keywords: Narrative Inquiry, Theorizing Practice, Professional Beliefs, EFL Teacher

There has been a shift away from modernism to post-modernism and from black-and-white logic to fuzzy logic. While modernism and black and white logic presuppose certainty, post-modernism and fuzzy logic presuppose uncertainty. Aligned with this shift, in language education, there has been a shift away from method to post-method. However, in language education research the quantitative mode of inquiry is still the dominant mode, especially in EFL contexts such as Iran. The researchers and educators working within this paradigm believe that there is a unidirectional relationship between theory and practice. But in line with the recent paradigm shift, there has been a shift away from grand theories towards grounded theories, i.e., theories of practice, and this paves the way for a bilateral relationship between theory and practice. In other words, just as theories improve language teaching practice, language teachers' stories conceptualized and theorized through narrative inquiry have the potential to improve and modify aspects of theories proposed by educationalists. Within this new paradigm, theory improves practice and practice improves theory. Despite these shifts and due to the dominance of the applied science model of teacher education, there is a dearth of data-driven studies which aim at theorizing practitioners' practice. Narrative inquiry, as a systematic way of recording and making sense of professional experience, helps researchers to theorize professional practice and develop theories of practice, which complement the dominant grand theories.

Theory-driven studies aim to improve language teaching practice by providing the field with findings which are supposed to be universally applicable. In practice, however, these findings are of very little use since the results:

1) are presented in terms of very complicated and daunting statistical procedures which make them incomprehensible to a vast majority of practitioners;
2) are inconclusive, that is, while one study verifies a hypothesis, the next study rejects the very same hypothesis.

Moreover, they inculcate the idea that researchers, who are at times alien to the teaching practice, know teaching better than the practitioners themselves. Narrative inquiry is a move in the opposite direction since:

1) it is in search of meaning rather than generalizable quantifications;
2) it gives voice and theorizes practitioners' experience rather than imposing something on classroom reality.

Literature Review

According to Richardson (1996a), beliefs are "psychologically held understandings, premises and propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 103). Other scholars believe that teachers' pedagogical thoughts and practices are shaped by their personal subconscious beliefs (Borg, 2006; Williams & Burden, 1997). Some scholars have tried to differentiate between knowledge and beliefs. For instance Woods (1996) believes that beliefs are more likely to be subjective and implicit, while knowledge tends to be objective and explicit (Woods, 1996). Similarly, Fenstermacher (1994) conceptualizes knowledge as factual propositions and beliefs as personal values.

But there remains a question, "where do these subconscious pedagogical beliefs come from? Scholars have specified several sources such as teachers':

- experiences as learners (Kennedy, 1991);
- educational biographies as learners (Borg, 2005);
- knowledge arising from teacher education (Borg, 2005);

While teachers' knowledge can change as a result of reflection and professional experience, their beliefs are a bit harder to change. While professional knowledge enlightens practice, it is teachers' professional beliefs that directly shape their practice. As noted by Shavelson and Stern (1981), what teachers do in the classroom is said to be governed by what they believe and these beliefs often serve to act as a filter through which instructional judgments and decisions are made. Taking the importance of beliefs into account, scholars believe that they:

- tend to exert a powerful long-term influence on teachers' instructional practices (Borg, 2001);
- influence teachers throughout their professional lives (Borg, 2003a)
- act as a kind of filter through which teachers interpret new information, and strongly influence what and how they learn (Fang, 1996);
- shape teachers' new information since it is accepted only if it is congruent with their pre-existing beliefs (Tillema, 1994);
- turn input to intake, since having been filtered through teachers' belief systems, input turns into intake (Pickering, 2005).
- clarify anything which may be vague or unfocused (Andrzejewski ,2009).
- govern what teachers say and do in the classroom (Ng & Farrell, 2003)

According to Johnson (1994) educational research on teachers' beliefs share three basic assumptions:

1) teachers' beliefs influence perception and judgment;

2) teachers' beliefs play a role in how information on teaching is translated into classroom practices; and

3) understanding teachers' beliefs is essential to improving teaching practices and teacher education programs (p. 439).

While some researchers believe that there is a drastic discrepancy between teachers' professional knowledge and practice, others believe that there is a close reciprocal relationship between beliefs and experience in the way they influence pedagogical practice (Allen, 2002). More specifically, "beliefs are thought to drive actions; however, experiences and reflection on action may lead to change in and/or addition to beliefs" (Richardson, 1996a, p. 104). As the review clearly shows there are many theoretical perspectives concerning the effect of beliefs on practice. What is missing in the literature is empirical evidence. Therefore, to make sense of how teachers' belief and action influence each other, the field is in need of empirical evidence rather than theoretical perspectives which reflect the subjective views of scholars. More specifically, the interplay between teachers' professional belief system and their teaching practice can be unearthed by collecting data from two main sources:

1) observation of teachers' practice; and
2) teachers' verbalization or narration of their experience.

Purpose and Significance

To give voice to the oft-silent group in theories of language teaching and provide the field with a study, which is conducted by practitioners for practitioners, this study aims to narrate the story behind the professional practice of an experienced EFL teacher who is locally famous for his practice. To encourage the practitioner to verbalize his years of experience of language teaching, qualitative data were elicited through the general research question, "What is your professional Modus Vivendi and what is the rationale behind it? Subsequent questions were not a move in another direction; rather they aimed at clarifying the participants' perspectives. Moreover, since some beliefs are held subconsciously and as such they are beyond verbalization, the participant's classes were also observed by one of the researchers and the processional beliefs implicit in her practice were brought to the surface by showing interest and curiosity while she is reporting her professional experience. To make sense of the participant's professional belief, the researchers recorded the participant's verbalization of her experience and observed her classes to find the interplay between her professional beliefs and practice.

This narrative inquiry, just like any other qualitative studies, is in search of meaning and the findings are significant since they:

- present the participants' perspectives without any complicated statistical procedures and as such the results are more comprehensible for the intended readers, that is, practitioners;
- present the field with an insider's view of language teaching, that is, a study by practitioners for practitioners rather than an outsider's view, that is, a study by researchers for practitioners;
- show that language teaching has come of age since its practitioners have their own theories reflected in their practice.

The Participant and the Rationale Behind Her Choice

This narrative study uncovers and makes sense of the professional experience of a successful EFL teacher in one of the most famous private language schools in Tehran, the Capital City of Iran. She has twenty-one years of EFL teaching experience. One of the researchers has worked with her as a colleague for more than seven years and has always witnessed that she has been approved of by her students, colleagues and other stakeholders. Her students had always admitted that she gives them what they want out of an English class in an EFL context, where English has no actual social use. Her colleagues also verify that she is a really knowledgeable teacher and has mastery over teaching methods and techniques. She is very up-to-date regarding teaching methods and linguistic knowledge. She is also a supervisor and a classroom observer. Moreover, the teachers whose classes have been observed by her certify her kind nature and professional practice. These reasons and the researchers' own personal interest in the participant's professional practice made them undertake this study to discover what has made her an effective teacher.

Research Method

Narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Narrative allows researchers to understand experience. People's lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of the experience itself. In contrast with the paradigmatic mode of thought which draws on reasoned analysis, logical proof, and empirical observation used to explain "cause and effect," to predict and control reality, and to create unambiguous objective "truth" that can be proven or disproved, narrative knowledge is created and constructed through stories of lived experiences, and the meanings created. It helps make sense of the ambiguity and complexity of human lives. Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told," said Clandinin and Connolly (2000, p. 20). The recent emphasis on reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and teacher research has strengthened the focus on listening to the voice of teachers and hearing their stories (Bell, 1997c; Gallas, 1997; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). More specifically, in teacher education, narrative inquiry is used to explore how teachers' stories shape their practice.

As Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) suggest, narrative can be both a method and the phenomenon of study. As a method, it begins with the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. Analysis of people's stories allows deeply hidden assumptions to surface. Narrative inquiry requires going beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates (Bell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Conle, 1992). Narrative analysis treats stories as knowledge *per se* which constitutes "the social reality of the narrator" (Etherington, 2004, p. 81) and conveys a sense of that person's experience in its depth, messiness, richness and texture, by using the actual words spoken. Analysis (meaning making) occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data collection (Gerhart, Tarragona, & Bava, 2007). The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants. In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn toward the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). In this process, the parties negotiate the meaning of the stories, adding a validation check to the analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Believing that stories reflect professional beliefs and shape their practice, this study took narrative inquiry as a legitimate mode of research to uncover and make sense of

professional experience of an experienced and professionally popular language teacher. Knowing that narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life, the researchers:

1. Selected an experienced language teacher who had stories or life experiences to tell, and spent considerable time with her gathering her stories, or "field texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through multiples types of information.
2. Collected information about her actual teaching context and analyzed her stories, and then provided a causal link between ideas and identified themes through restorying.
3. Collaborated with the participant by actively involving her in the research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), a process in which both the researchers and the researched learned and changed (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).
4. Negotiate the meaning of the stories with the participant so as to add a validation check to the analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Collection and Analysis

This study is the result of a joint effort of a university professor and two MA TEFL candidates. To clarify the division of labor, it is worth noting that data were:

1) collected and transcribed by MA TEFL students; and
2) analyzed and reported by the professor.

Since the participant and one of the researchers were colleagues, data collection was not that challenging. However, since English is a foreign language for the participant, she was asked to narrate her professional experience in her native language to make sure that:

1) she feels at home; and
2) nothing important is left out because possible lapses in her proficiency.

Moreover, her classes were also observed to see how her beliefs shape her practice. Thus data consisted of the participant's report of her professional experience and field notes.

There are different forms of narrative analysis – some may focus on "content" of stories; others on "meaning." Stories can be viewed as a window onto a knowable reality and analysed using concepts derived from theory, for example, thematic analysis, or concepts derived from the data, for example, grounded theory – usually referred to as "analysis of narratives" (Bleakley, 2005). To analyze the research data, in line with the coding schemes of grounded theory, we derived concepts from the data, that is, the participant's verbalization and the researcher's observation notes by:

- getting the informed consent of the participant;
- recording her story;
- transcribing it verbatim;
- deriving concepts from the story and observation notes;
- conceptualizing the participant's experience; and
- showing her the final conceptualization for verification and any possible modifications

Results

The coding schemes of grounded theory enabled the researchers to derive the concepts or the building blocks of the participant's professional beliefs from her professional experience of language teaching in an EFL context. What follows aims at showing how her belief system enlightens and directs her practice. All in all, the conceptualization of the participant's professional experience clearly shows that her professional beliefs not only liberates her from the shackles of alternative methods but also helps her follow a principled approach. The principles shaping her experience include:

1) maximizing learner involvement;
2) focusing on responsive teaching;
3) leaving room for practice;
4) learning by doing or communicating to learn;
5) personalizing practice; and
6) matching contents and objectives.

What follows grounds these principles in the participant's perspective by bringing theoretically relevant extracts.

Maximize Learner Involvement

Iranian students are usually dissatisfied with the high level of teacher's talk in the classroom and their low level of speaking chance. This is the common claim of most Iranian learners although they confess that their teacher is knowledgeable. This is why learners' involvement is important according to Akram:

> *Student's involvement is a key factor in an EFL classroom, which can guarantee the success or failure of that class. Whenever the learner starts speaking, the feeling of satisfaction evolves and this kind of satisfaction is the best motivation in order to push them to more learning. When they are involved they feel that the teacher takes them into account and feel responsible for their learning.*

To have a learner-centered classroom, learner involvement must be as high as possible. There are many techniques, which could be used to enhance learners' involvement. The most important one is that the teacher should try to have as much elicitation as possible. According to Akram:

> *Try to elicit everything and minimize teacher talk. You can use and take advantage of even a small situation like asking about today's agenda. Let your students talk even in occasions where you believe they would not be able to. Due to their limited proficiency, learners are reluctant to talk. Through different elicitation techniques you should help them break through this mental barrier. For instance, once you presented a reading passage, make the students check each other's comprehension rather than checking it yourself.*

To maximize learner involvement, the teacher should consider learners' proficiency. Contrary to what some teachers who believe involving learners cannot be started at lower levels of proficiency, Akram assumes that this is possible:

In higher levels of proficiency involving students is easier and it's because of their having a high level of linguistic knowledge. At low levels, I try to have a fifty-fifty involvement which is shared between the teacher and the students. When you talk, the learners pick up grammar and vocabulary subconsciously. However, when you encourage them to talk, they find a chance to use their knowledge of words and grammar to express what they meaning. I believe learning and using complement each other. For instance, once you taught "wish" clauses, they know it but the question is, "Can they use it?" to make students use it, you can encourage them to write sentences of their own such as: "I live in a small flat. I wish I lived in a bigger flat."

The participant's belief concerning learner involvement is in drastic contrast with the comprehension approach and Krashen's (1981) comprehensible input hypothesis. The participant believes that comprehensible input is necessary but not sufficient. To enable them to communicate, the teacher should encourage what is known as comprehensible output (Swain, 1985).

Focus on Responsive Teaching

Good teaching is responsive. That is, it responds to learners' needs. Instead of teaching an externally imposed syllabus, the participant specifies the learners' needs and focuses on parts which are in tune with the learners' needs and deemphasizes the other parts. There are several ways to get to know the learners' needs such as using a questionnaire or conferencing or writing. In Iran this concept is not taken very seriously. The reason is the teacher education takes teachers as the consumer of educational ideas. As a result, they prefer teaching as usual and avoid any innovations. However Akram states:

When students come to my institute or classroom I ask them why they are learning English. You don't need a questionnaire. This can be done orally. Based on their common interest, I classify them into different groups and adapt my instruction accordingly. To find the proper path for instruction, administering a placement test is not enough. Learners may have the same level of proficiency but very different needs. Suppose, Reza and Maryam are in the same class but they learn English for two different reason. One may need English to study in an English speaking country while the other may need conversational skills for a ten-day tour European tour.

Why are your students learning English? In private language schools of Iran such as where the researchers and the participant work, learners usually refer to institutes to enhance their ability in speaking and listening. However this is not general. An important factor for a successful teacher seems to be paying attention to what the learner wants out of a class. According to Akram this gives the learners the feeling that they are important for you and their needs are your priorities:

You shouldn't just teach. You teach the students. So, prior to teaching you should know their needs. I myself try to identify my students' needs and value them by adapting my lesson plans and teaching materials based on their needs. Based on my analysis of my students' needs, I adapt the syllabus. That is, I deemphasize the parts, which do not respond to my students' needs.

Recognition of students needs should not be taken for granted. When a teacher knows the learners' needs and appreciates them by taking them into action, the learner is pleased with that teacher and her method. To confirm this notion Akram states:

> *If we supply what the learners demand, the learner will enjoy the instruction and evaluates the teacher positively. Conversely, if the teacher ignores the learners' needs, they evaluate the teacher and her instruction negatively. An analogy will better clarify what I mean. You see, classroom is like a supermarket and the learner is the customer. Naturally, the shop assistant, i.e., the teacher in our case, gives him or her what s/he needs rather than give her what the supermarket has.*

Leave Room for Practice

When taught effectively, students will receive the information the teacher presents. However, this does not mean that they can use it. To enable students to use what you have taught, you should encourage students to practice what they have learned till they have control over their knowledge. Without practicing teaching is nonsense. If the practitioner follows the traditional approach of "presentation, practice, production," s/he should take the last two parts seriously. What Akram believes is:

> *Many institutes present vocabulary and grammar, but when they want to use that knowledge, learners are totally unable to do so. Maybe one of the reasons of my success is that I present less material in comparison with other teachers, this gives me a chance to provide more time for practice. Using knowledge depends on having sufficient control over it and this control is the result of practice.*

If lots of materials are presented without enough practice, the presentation phase will be a waste of time since learners have learned something they cannot actually use. Practice helps learners internalize the material and feel them. Akram strongly believes in the saying that goes "practice makes perfect":

> *When you involve them in practice, the learners get familiar with the use of the point and if it is a kind of authentic practice, they learn how to use it in real situations. Sometimes you divide the procedure into two parts of mechanical practice and real production if the point of teaching is more demanding. What matters is that teachers should not forget mechanical practice under the disguise of communicative approach.*

The teacher can have different methods to involve students in practice. However, using pair work and group work really helps. Language knowledge that you present can be internalized during the practice stage as the learners deal with the tasks and exercises directly. Akram approves of using group work and pair work for practice:

> *In addition to immersing students to lots of mechanical practice through the drilling techniques of audio-lingual method, I involve them in more meaningful practice through group work and pair work. Learners face their problems and also peers can correct each other. During pair work and group work, I believe*

> *peer correction is more effective that teacher correction since it involves them in more practice.*

Develop Subconscious Knowledge of Grammar through Communication

In line with the monitor model, it is the subconscious knowledge that generates sentences. Conscious knowledge of grammar acts only as a monitor. That is, the subconscious knowledge generates sentences and the conscious knowledge merely monitors the output. Along these lines, Akram believes first we should focus on acquisition rather than learning, i.e. learners must acquire grammar through communication:

> *When students listen to get the speaker's intended meaning, their conscious attention is leveled at meaning but repeated exposure to language forms help them develop a subconscious knowledge of forms. Moreover, repeated use of forms in actual communication lead to a subconscious development of those forms.*

Instead of focusing on using to learn, most language teachers focus on learning to use. The consequence is that although students know the rule, they cannot apply it when they need it. Our high school graduates have a high level of conscious knowledge of grammar but they cannot communicate in English since there is very little time for the controlled practice and active use of that structure in the classroom. Akram states:

> *Instead of presenting useful grammatical structures, many teachers overload the learner with bunch of vocabulary and grammar, when they want to apply them in a actual situations, they need to think a lot about which word or grammar item to use or among lots of these synonyms which is appropriate for this specific situation. Repeated practice and repeated use of a structure in the classroom will solve this problem.*

Teaching grammar and vocabulary mentally and implicitly must happen in natural situations. To show how teachers can do that, Akram explains:

> *For instance, to teach "wish structure," I never verbalize the structure; rather, I immerse my students in examples which clearly show the usage and use of the structure. For example, Maryam, I wish I had your watch, but I don't. Sahar, I wish I had a daughter, but I have two sons. You know, I wish I were rich, but you know I am not. Then I will ask them to talk about their wishes and make sentences similar to mine. Then I give them some extra uses of the structure. After lots of practice and making sure that students can use the structure correctly, I may briefly explain the grammatical structure to consolidate their knowledge.*

Personalize Practice

A very effective way of increasing learners' motivation and involvement is by making the learning personally meaningful. Also learners like real materials since they can make a better relationship with them. Akram's advice is teaching in context:

> *Try to relate whatever you teach in students' real life. This is the most important part of teaching which shows how much your teaching has been authentic and related to your learners' real lives. For instance, when you teach "if clauses," you should go beyond mechanical practice of this structure, and help the students personalize it by helping them communicate their genuine concerns.*

Although the Audio-lingual techniques are very useful in helping learners gain automatic control over their knowledge, they are not sufficient since they are detached from actual use, especially from students' needs and experiences. Akram explains:

> *To help students master the structure "this is…," the teachers may involve students in mechanical practice of this structure using various types of drills presented by the Audio-lingual method. However, they find this structure totally useless unless the teacher relates this structure to learners' communicative needs, i.e., introducing others. Therefore, there should be a pragmatic motivation behind classroom practice. For instance, when "This is a book" is detached from students communicative needs, the sentence, "this is my father" has a high communicative value since it enables students to introduce others.*

Teaching vocabulary can be no exception. In addition to the de-contextualized presentation of practice of some words and phrases related to banking, for instance, the teacher helps students to personalize these words by asking a question that motivates learners to use them. Akram explains:

> *Having taught words related to the bank, I ask my students, "Why do we usually go to a bank?" This question enables me to elicit utterances such as, "to open an account," "to save money," "to deposit money," "to withdraw money" and the so on and so forth.*

This can be achieved by integrating the structure and the individual learner's personal perspectives, ideas, experiences in to the process of learning. The participant's example better elucidates the point:

> *For instance, after I presented conditional sentences, type II, I ask a genuine question such as, "what would you do if you were rich?" This question helps them relate this structure to their personal aspirations and wishes. Then I involve them in pair work and encourage them to ask similar questions such as, "What would you do if you won 1 million dollar?" "Where would you go if you had a two-week vacation?"*

Match the Content with the Objectives

Three aspects of language education should match: learners' needs; objectives; and content. A successful teacher formulates the objectives in line with the learners' needs and adapts the content to enable learners to achieve their goal. English language text books are general books for learning English all over the world. The most famous ones are not written for a special context or group. When using them some adaption might be needed regarding your own context, culture and student's needs and your concept of teaching. Most textbooks follow the same tired, boring pattern and include the same major functions, grammar and vocabulary. Akram admits this kind of adaption:

For instance if your students need English for academic purposes, you may emphasize grammar at the cost of social functions. On the other hand, if your students need English for social communication, you may deemphasize grammar and academic vocabulary and focus on functions presented in the textbook. The textbook many lack in the needed function; hence, you may add them. Similarly, it's structural content may outweigh the social functions. So you should leave out some grammar points and replace them with useful functions.

The main reason for this is not scientific at all--it is the publisher's unwillingness to take a risk by publishing something new. Also, by trying to please all teachers, publishers use unnatural and unreal materials in textbooks. It is the teacher's responsibility to add any extra necessary vocabulary, functions, grammar, or topics that you feel the students may want or need. According to Akram:

Most of the time the textbook do not match the learners' level of proficiency or even the book is not appropriate in some parts regarding own culture. The teacher must do some adaption based on their own culture and teach the values of their culture. If the book is not to the level of proficiency, again the adaption is the teacher's duty. Considering culture, a good teacher never tries to impose negative or positive attitude towards the target culture, while she or he tries to appreciate their own culture values and adapt the materials with them.

Despite the fact that the content of the textbook is in line with the learners' needs and your educational objectives, the textbook may hinder learners from achieving their goals because it presents the material in the wrong order. In this case the teacher should rearrange the sequence. Akram explains:

For example if the sequence of the book is listening, vocabulary, grammar, and I know that the listening task is loaded with new forms, I teach grammar and vocabulary first. Unfamiliar forms make them focus on form and as such they cannot follow the flow of speech.

Moreover, the textbook may present some cultural values from the target culture. Although, students should be aware of these cultural norms and values, they cannot communicate their cultural knowledge in their own culture. In such cases, the teacher should replace them with things, which have a higher communicative utility. Akram states:

For instance, if the lesson focuses on ceremonies and festivals like Thanksgiving orHalloween, I present them very briefly and save time to focus on local festivals such as Nowroz or Yalda Night or other events since I know that they will talk about them outside the classroom.

Although these principles shaped the participant's perspectives, she was not consciously aware of them. The verbalizing of her thoughts and interaction with the researchers helped her bring them to the conscious level. Moreover, when the final conceptualization and the final draft of the manuscript was shown to her for verification, she became more confident in her professional practice since prior to this study she was not aware of these principles. When she realized that subconsciously she has been following a principled approach she was proud

of her practice. She was the first consumer of her own product. Reading the manuscript enabled her to:

1) bring her belief system to the conscious level;
2) realize that her practice is supported by theories of language teaching;
3) recognize her contribution to the field by providing practitioners with her theory of practice.

Discussion

The results clearly indicate that the participant started theorizing her experience in the dialogical process of data collection. The reason was that once she was narrating her professional experience, the researchers were not passive listeners; rather they elicited her beliefs by showing interest and helping her elaborate her beliefs by showing curiosity. This curiosity lead to dialogues and the dialogues helped her verbalize her belief system more effectively. Narrative inquiry gave her a chance to bring her professional beliefs to the conscious level. Being deeply rooted in her experience, the belief system was subconscious and as such difficult to verbalize. Having verbalized her thought through the research process, she became aware of her own theoretical perspectives. Not only was this narrative inquiry beneficial for the participant since brought her theory of practice to the conscious level, it was also beneficial for the researchers because the participant's theoretical perspectives enlightened their professional practice. The study is significant in that:

- it gives voice to experienced practitioners who are usually at the consumer end of theories;
- the findings can be fed to teacher education programs to complement the applied science model of teacher education; and
- theorizes implicit knowledge of language teaching and legitimizes it as another source of knowledge for teacher education.

Despite the professional legitimacy of data-driven studies, which aim at generating hypothesis, the theory-driven studies which aim at hypothesis testing still dominate the field of language teaching. Though they are very useful for researchers and policy makers, they are of very little use for practitioners since the results of these studies:

1) are yielded under experimental conditions but they are irrationally generalized to actual classes which are far from experimental;
2) are presented in very technical jargon and complicated statistical procedures which make them incomprehensible to almost all practitioners.

As a result, theory-driven studies fail in improving practice. On the other hand, data-driven studies including narrative inquiry better suits the purpose of improving practice since:

1) they theorize practices that have withstood the test of time;
2) help practitioners make sense of their own experience;
3) the results are comprehensible to even those who have no academic background in language teaching since the results are presented in words and concepts rather than complicated quantification and incomprehensible equations and statistical procedures.

Taking the merits of data-driven studies into account, this study has clear implications for:

- practitioners since it helps them make sense of their own and others practice; and
- educators since it encourages them to take theories of practice seriously and feed them to the pre-service and in-service teacher education programs

Compared with quantitative studies, there is a dearth of well-designed qualitative studies. Since this study was general in scope, interested researcher can follow this tradition by theorizing specific aspects of language teaching practice such as teaching vocabulary or any other component or language skills.

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