

Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn: Lessons from a Thai EFL Teacher

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by an experienced Thai English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher when she attempted to integrate the Western teaching methodologies she acquired in an MA in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program in the U.S. into language classrooms in Thailand. Also, how the program in the U.S. impacted her subsequent teaching practices is discussed. The researcher conducted an interview as it reflects her subscription to socio-cultural theory that teacher knowledge is grounded in experience. The results indicated a gap between the theories she acquired in her program in the US and the current practices in her EFL classrooms in Thailand. The teacher regarded the characteristics of Thai EFL learners as one of the major factors that hinders the successful implementation of the Western ideologies. However, the theories enabled her to make well-informed decisions about her current teaching practices.

1. Introduction

English is increasingly used as the global lingua franca. Further, due to the economic, political, and cultural dominance of English-speaking countries, a growing demand for English language proficiency has been apparent in every corner of the globe. Thailand is no exception. In an attempt to portray the status quo of English language learning in a Thai context, some scholars have aptly expressed their opinion that “a good knowledge of English is no longer a luxury but a necessity in Thai society” (Wongsothorn, Hiranburana, & Chinnawongs, 2003, p. 453). An increase in demand for English language education has become a significant consequence of this phenomenon, whereby an increasingly large number of non-native English teachers are enrolled in teacher education programs in English-speaking countries.

Extensive research reveals the failure of teacher education programs to accommodate the perceived needs and expectations of many teachers which include improved English language proficiency, second language acquisition theories and methodologies, and cultural understanding (e.g., England & Roberts, 1989; Liu, 1999; Polio, 1994). Worse yet, teachers who return to their home country upon graduation find that the emphasis on the “one-size-fits-all approaches” (Kubota, 1998, p. 394) of Western ideologies imbued in most US-based English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) teacher education are problematic to implement.

Despite considerable interest in exploring the alienation between theory and practice, few research studies have been undertaken in the Thai EFL context. To bridge the gap, this study was conducted. The purpose of the study is therefore to investigate the challenges faced by an experienced Thai EFL teacher when she attempted to incorporate the Western teaching ideologies she acquired in her Master of Arts (MA) program in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in the U.S. into language classrooms in Thailand.

The following research questions for the study were formulated:

1. What are the challenges faced by the teacher when integrating what she acquired in the MA-TESOL program into a language classroom in Thailand?
2. How did the MA-TESOL program in the U.S. impact the teacher’s subsequent teaching practices in Thailand?
3. How did the teacher internalize, transform, and reconceptualize her knowledge of teaching?

2. Literature Review

The following section explores the perceived needs and concerns of non-native English speakers (NNSs) as well as the transferability of Western ideologies to EFL teaching practices. In addition, central to this section is the justification for the need of the current research study.

2.1 Perceived Needs and Concerns of Non-native English Speakers

Some research studies document the concerns that NNSs have when teaching in a context wherein most teachers are native speakers. These concerns include, but are not limited to, a lack of self-confidence about their English language proficiency, self-perceived bias based on their non-native status in hiring, and, when studying in the TESOL programs outside of their home country, a lack of voice and visibility (Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Polio

& Wilson-Duffy, 1998). According to Kamhi-Stein (2000), among a wide array of measures to ameliorate these needs and concerns would be for TESOL programs to pair non-native and native-speaking students in collaborative projects and other practical experiences, to address issues related to NNSs throughout the curriculum, to engage non-native teachers and students in mentoring programs, and to address self-identified language proficiency needs. Such efforts to improve teacher education programs would provide considerable advantage for all teachers-in-preparation, regardless of status.

2.2 Transferability of Western Ideologies to EFL Teaching Practices

Due to the increase in the number of NNSs in TESOL programs, it is also worthwhile to discuss the transferability of the Western theories to the students' teaching contexts, particularly the EFL ones in which exposure to the target language is very limited. Today, in Western countries, predominant communicative approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Whole Language (WL) are implemented primarily as a corrective to perceived shortcomings of other traditional approaches such as Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and the Audiolingual Method (ALM) which are still popular in many countries around the globe (Mitchell, 1994). Specifically, a number of studies have investigated the Asian EFL contexts in particular (e.g., Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Li, 1998, Kuo, 1995) and reported the most prevalent implementation of these conventional teaching pedagogies in these specific contexts. Anderson (1993) examined the pros and cons of using the communicative approach in China and remarked that the limitations and constraints specific to the Chinese context must be taken into account. Based on her study, such hindering factors as the lack of materials, the pressure put on teachers by peers, students, and the educational system, the dire need for students' examination preparation, and the Chinese cultural differences are dilemmas that call for sensitivity to the traditional Chinese methods, together with the needs of teachers and students alike. Given those differences as examples, tensions and challenges that most NNSs inevitably confront emerge when attempting to transfer the knowledge they acquire in the Western-based programs to their own teaching context (Lo, 2001). Likewise, it should not be too far-fetched to assume that mismatches between the Western theories and the realities of the Thai EFL classrooms exist and potentially impede the application of these principles embedded in the Western teacher education programs.

Even though many studies have investigated the disjuncture between Western ideologies in US-based MA-TESOL programs and EFL practices in various contexts, very few studies, particularly in the Thai context, have been undertaken to explore the perspective of those who have returned to teach in their home country after program completion. It is, therefore, hoped that this study will yield valuable insights into the professional life of a Thai EFL teacher through her articulation of needs and concerns when testing the theories she acquired as well as her perception of the overall program's impact upon her subsequent teaching experience.

3. Theoretical Framework

Grounded in the existing literature on teacher professional development in the areas of both general education and TESOL, the following theoretical frameworks prevail in this study.

3.1 Social Mediation of Knowledge

For this study, the aspects of becoming a teacher and teacher professional development that are interwoven with teacher beliefs and knowledge one possesses must be elucidated. Johnson and Golombek (2003) argue that teacher knowledge should not be viewed as a direct transferal of content knowledge to teachers' expertise. Rather, teachers put the knowledge through a process of internalization, transformation, and reconceptualization of the knowledge on the basis of their own knowledge, artifacts, and other members in the society in which they engage. In light of their subscription to Vygotskian sociocultural theory, the focus of this study was put on the very theory as a viable framework for understanding teacher learning. Specifically, the concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which Vygotsky defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86) was primarily employed as the analytical framework. Additionally, Donato and McCormick (1994) posit that within this sociocultural perspective, learners use tools as a means of mediating between themselves and the world, and these tools help support their learning. In language classrooms, mediational tools include, but are not limited to, textbooks, explicit instruction, teacher assistance, and opportunities for interaction in the target language. From their viewpoint, it is likely that the attitudes towards using these mediational tools result from social practices and academic experience.

3.2 Teacher's Narrative Inquiry

Johnson and Golombek (2002) conceptualize narrative inquiry as a "systematic exploration that is conducted *by* teachers and *for* teachers through their own stories and language" (p. 6). Inquiring into their own experiences, teachers begin to interrogate and reinterpret what they already knew. Their stories thus allow them to express their existing beliefs and knowledge about teaching, and make connections between their personal and professional lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Clarke (1994), teachers' narratives are considered authentic as they enable teachers to theorize in their own language, link specific events with theory, and embody the dialectical relationship between theory and practice. In addition, Golombek and Johnson (2004) argue that through narrative inquiry, teachers make sense of their professional worlds and, to develop as teachers, make worthwhile changes in themselves and their instructional practices. Pavlenko (2002) adds that, in the realm of foreign language teaching, narratives provide profound insights into

the underlying assumptions of learners from diverse cultures through analyzing their stories. Also, the fact the researchers can document experiences as discursive constructions rather than as factual statements allows them to divulge multiple sociocultural, sociohistorical, and rhetorical influences that shape narrative construction.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participant

Marisa (pseudonym) was selected as the participant for the current study owing to her practical EFL teaching experience in Thailand. She is a 37-year-old female teacher who received her B.Ed. in English from a university in Thailand, and pursued her MA-TESOL degree at a large Midwestern university in the U.S. After her graduation, Marisa had an initial experience teaching English for hotel personnel at a hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. Subsequently, she became a lecturer at the university level teaching academic reading and writing, communication in English, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). At the time of the interview, she was starting her PhD in Language Education at a major Midwestern university in the U.S.

4.2 Instrument

For this study, a one-hour semi-structured interview was conducted as it “has a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions, yet at the same time there is an openness to changes of sequences and forms of questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told by the subjects” (Steinar, 1996, p. 124). The semi-structured interview questions contained in the Appendix were asked to elicit in-depth information regarding Marisa’s educational experience both in Thailand and in the U.S. and her perception of how the teacher education program in the U.S. impacted her practical experience as a teacher in Thailand. Because of the semi-structured nature of this interview, the order in which the researcher asked the questions varied, depending on the direction of the conversation, and the researcher also added or omitted some questions to accommodate the interview.

4.3 Data Collection

The one-hour face-to-face interview with the participant, which was tape recorded, was conducted at a Midwestern university in the U.S. in March 2008. Thai was used as the medium of interview. A total of 7 pages of verbatim was transcribed and translated from Thai into English by the researcher, a native speaker of Thai. The transcript of the interview was sent to Marisa for her member check and further comments.

5. Data Analysis

For this study, Vygotskian sociocultural theory (Leont'ev, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985) was employed as a qualitative framework to analyze the interview data. Johnson and Golombek (2003) argue that how teachers learn to teach is a socially mediated activity, and teacher consciousness develops through their engagement in social activities. As previously justified, the concepts of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and mediational means were focused on as the key elements in the data analysis. The three mediational means within ZPD as elaborated in Johnson and Golombek (2003) include: (1) object-regulated, in which a person receives assistance from cultural artifacts (e.g., a lesson plan); (2) other-regulated, in which a person is helped by other experts or more knowledgeable peers; and (3) self-regulated, in which a person takes control over cognitive awareness and activities. The essence of this concept provides a rationale for the use of mediational means as the basis for coding in this study.

To analyze the data, the researcher adopted Cain's (1991) methods of thematic analysis. The following is the procedure of data analysis: (1) Conduct textual analysis by noting main points, episodes and events and turning points, propositions made about main points; (2) Look for reappearances. Propositions reappear as (a) thematic taken for granted assumptions and (b) guidelines for describing what happens. Episodes/events reappear as predictable sequences; and (3) Identify common patterns of assumptions from (a) above and common sequences from (b) above. For the study, the researcher was the data coder to yield a rich understanding of Marisa's professional life.

Riessman (1993) suggests four ways of approaching validation in narrative analysis: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. As Riessman explained, persuasiveness "is greatest when theoretical claims are supported with evidence from informants' accounts and when alternative interpretations of the data are considered" (p. 65). The researcher attempted to adhere to this criterion for persuasiveness. Correspondence can be achieved through checking the findings with the participant. The researcher sent the manuscript to the participant and asked whether the findings seemed to describe her experiences. The participant responded, saying "The findings really resonate with my experiences".

6. Findings

Marisa's beliefs and knowledge about teaching and learning and how she learned to teach were the primary focus of this current study. To that end, several questions were asked regarding the challenges she faced in her Thai EFL classrooms, the impact of the US-based program on her subsequent teaching practices, and how her profession developed by internalizing, transforming, and reconceptualizing her knowledge of teaching.

As the focus of the study is based upon the theoretical framework employed for this study, the following information that Marisa provided during the interview was documented in relation to the three research questions as follows:

6.1 Challenges Encountered in the Thai EFL Context

Below are the two major themes that emerged from the interview data which address the first research question as to the challenges Marisa encountered when she attempted to integrate what she acquired in the MA-TESOL program into the language teaching classrooms in Thailand.

6.1.1 Diversity of Students vs. One-Size-Fits-All Approaches

Marisa argued that when making decisions about her current teaching practices, the learners' characteristics and learning styles which are specific to the Thai EFL context are deterministic. The quote following is illustrative:

Even within the group of university level students, their preferences varied among themselves according to their majors. For instance, students from the Faculty of Law and those from Political Science seemingly preferred to value teacher's direct transfer of knowledge rather than classroom activities or collaborative learning, which did not appear to be the case of students from the Faculty of Liberal Arts or those from Mass Communications.

In addition, given the fact that students' perceptions of teaching style differed considerably among themselves, Marisa needed to pay specific attention to each group of students she was dealing with. An example is the Total Physical Response Method (TPR), which Marisa used frequently as it seemed to work very well in real classroom teaching. However, when TPR was embraced in a class full of students from the first group mentioned above, her teaching ended in a complete failure. While this particular method did not prove effective in that class, it worked flawlessly in another class of students from the second group.

6.1.2 Culture of Learning

Even though different groups of students tended to be vastly different in relation to their learning preferences and their attitudes towards teaching styles, Marisa expressed her great surprise about one common learning style among her students, regardless of domain:

One of my observations was that my students were perfectly capable of rote memorization. I guess it might be typical of all Asian learners. I had no idea why they could memorize almost anything. For example, they could

recite all grammatical rules I asked them to. That was incredible! You know, the first day of teaching, I was really surprised by the students I taught. I asked them to study on their own, and they could memorize the whole stuff. So I don't know how to argue with the theory against rote memorization as a learning tool. Most people think that with rote learning, students don't retain the information. I'm not sure about that. What I really know is that they do remember, and that's amazing. However, I think most students usually memorize the lessons for test taking purposes.

It is clear here that Marisa realized the complex reality of her teaching context in which students had different purposes of learning. Also, the fact that examination was one important factor that forced students to take their learning seriously was so evident that she needed to capture and acknowledge it. Not only did examination affect how students engaged in their learning process, but it also became one of the factors hindering a wide range of teaching methods in classrooms. Despite Marisa's intention to encompass various teaching strategies to foster students' active learning, Marisa was always challenged by the time constraint. To illustrate, before a mid-term examination, she was supposed to cover the first four chapters so as to make sure that her students would be able to perform as well as other students in other classes on the same examination. Marisa was, therefore, well aware that her failure would inevitably result in her students' failure as well.

6.2 How the MA-TESOL Impacted the Practices

Even though Marisa graduated with a Bachelor of Education in English from a university in Thailand, she was introduced to limited teaching theories and approaches. Additionally, she only had a few months' teaching experience under the student teaching program during the last year in her undergraduate program. In order to yield a wider repertoire, Marisa decided to pursue her MA-TESOL degree in the U.S.

6.2.1 Formal Training in TESOL

Throughout the interview, the delineation of Marisa's experience with the MA-TESOL program in the U.S. manifested itself in terms of the benefits to her teaching profession as well as the perceived practicalities of the program. When asked about her expectations prior to entering the program, Marisa clearly mentioned that EFL teaching methodologies and a higher level of English proficiency were what she desired to gain the most from the program.

Due to her limited teaching experience, she regarded the MA-TESOL program as a very useful preparation that fulfilled her needs and expectations as illustrated by the following quote:

Before I started teaching, I didn't know how to teach. I mean I knew only a few teaching approaches but had no formal teaching experience. So when I came to study, I learned to teach based on the theories and methods that were introduced in the program. I really think these helped me teach better.

6.2.2 From Theory to Practice

After having discussed Marisa's formal preparation in TESOL, it was worthwhile to investigate how the program impacted her subsequent teaching situations in the Thai EFL context. The quote following is illustrative:

Personally, I think I became more confident when teaching. To be frank, I believe the program helped me teach better. I'll give you some concrete examples. I used to teach English the way I was taught when I was very young. When teaching a vocabulary word, I presented three sentences in which the target word is used to provide students with rich contexts to help them determine the word meaning. As you may imagine, that was incredibly time-consuming. So, after I learned how to teach from the program, I knew what unnecessary steps I could skip because of time limitations in class. And you know, I was more impressed with my own teaching. Also...one more example as I mentioned, rather than writing a word on a piece of colored paper and posting it on the wall, I brought props that represent the words to be covered. And I guess it was fun for students and helped them retain their knowledge.

6.3 How the Teacher Learned to Teach

In the following section, the emphasis was placed on how Marisa received assistance from different mediational means which serve as temporary others or what contributed to success in teaching. Faced by a wide range of challenges in classrooms and the overall Thai context, she sought help from these following entities:

6.3.1 Teacher Educators as Temporary Others

It is evident from her comment that, in terms of the overall impression of the program, Marisa strongly felt that she made the right decision to pursue the degree in her specific program that placed an emphasis not only on ESL contexts but also on EFL ones. Furthermore, some professors in the program had extensive experience in teaching EFL, which made a valuable contribution to many students' needs. Since Marisa transferred from another program in the U.S. to this one, she provided a clear portrayal of the different situation in her previous program in which people kept discussing their own ESL contexts which were not relevant to her specific teaching context in Thailand.

While discussing the program's emphasis on EFL contexts, Marisa vividly mentioned one of the most practical courses she took as part of the program requirements as follows:

I was really interested in "Methods of Teaching" because, in this course, I learned to put theory into practice. I also liked the professor teaching the course, and believe it or not, I still remember her name and how she taught the course. She is a very skillful teacher with very outstanding personal characteristics that are perfectly suited for teaching EFL. She also had teaching experience in Japan. One day in her class, she showed a video of how to teach English vocabulary with props. The teacher in the video taught about house cleaning, and she brought a lot of house cleaning equipment to class. That was awesome! I think students will learn much better if you teach them that way. When I learned to teach an English word in Thailand, we usually write the word on a piece of colored paper. That is not effective compared to using props because students learn the content better and the words become more memorable. For the final project of the course, I had a chance to apply what I learned through lesson planning and teaching demonstration, and, you know, that was really practical.

Even though Marisa found the overall program very useful for her subsequent teaching profession, she verbalized her feelings about a few courses such as Introduction to College Teaching and Language Planning. She thought that the former was not practical as it provided a too general knowledge while the latter appeared to be irrelevant to her profession as a teacher. Further, when asked about what the program could have done differently to address her specific needs, Marisa mentioned the necessity for faculty diversity. At the time she was studying in the program, there were only a few key professors whose specialization was in EFL teaching. Most students in the program, therefore, felt obliged to take up to three or four courses with each of these professors in order to satisfy the program requirements. As Marisa pointed out, with the dedication and professionalism of the faculty, the program would broaden students' horizons and assist students navigating through the potential challenges in the field.

6.3.2 Hands-on Experience as Temporary Other

In spite of her positive perspective of the MA-TESOL program, she argued that some concepts she acquired in the program were not applicable to her teaching context in Thailand without specific modification. The following is indicative of her attitude:

Audiolingualism is one of the concepts that I embraced in my teaching. While practicing the target language, students actively engaged in their own learning in a relaxing environment. However, my MA-TESOL program did not concentrate on this particular method because at that time CLT was very popular whereas GTM and ALM were thought to be outdated and impractical.

Viewing ALM as one of the effective methods to implement in her teaching, Marisa substituted for her lack of substantive knowledge by working independently on a paper investigating a wide range of instructional approaches which included several conventional ones. While working on this paper as part of the degree requirements, Marisa was increasingly exposed to other teaching approaches. That experience was reflected through the reiteration of her viewpoint:

That was the first time I learned more about the concept of the audiolingual method, which, in my opinion, is well used with beginner and pre-intermediate level students. And I totally disagree with the idea that these traditional methods are old and by no means practical. For my teaching, this method really worked!

In addition, Marisa further critiqued the use of CLT in classrooms in terms of the possibilities and/or difficulties as will be discussed in a later part of the paper.

6.3.3 Students as Temporary Others

After her Master's degree graduation, Marisa gained initial experience teaching English for hotel personnel at a hotel in Bangkok, Thailand. In an attempt to equip the hotel staff with the essential skills in effective communication, Marisa, as a novice teacher, prepared her lessons in accordance with what she was taught in her teacher education program. One of the difficulties she experienced was articulated as follows:

At the very first time I started teaching, I tried to follow what my professors encouraged me to do such as writing a lesson plan that includes warm-up activities, introducing the topic, steps involved, concluding the lesson, and so on. But when I taught in class, I realized that the lesson plan I wrote didn't work at all. [laughs] Teaching ESP courses should address business needs, and because we didn't have much time, I could only focus intensively on the real use of language in common hotel situations. For example, when I taught them how to greet hotel guests, I needed to quickly go through all essential vocabulary for them to learn and practice using the words or sentences. It was totally impossible to have time for any warm-up activities.

This clearly identifies tensions Marisa had with her teaching in a specific context wherein students' needs and expectations are to be taken into account. According to her detailed explanation, tensions were resolved once more effective means of teaching were derived from her interaction with students. Instead of relying on a lesson plan per se as a temporary other, Marisa gradually learned from the students' articulation of ideas on how she could help them better learn English. Their learning preferences expressed through the needs analysis process proved practical and realistic in their own specific context, and this strongly called for Marisa's pedagogical adaptation as exemplified in the above quote. In this case, it must be acknowledged that Marisa's students played a pivotal role of the "others" in her ZPD development, which ultimately contributed to her impressive accomplishment.

6.3.4 Instructional Materials as Temporary Others

Often times, Marisa sought help from cultural artifacts in order to cope with the current teaching dilemmas that were disclosed in the interview with her. In an attempt to do so, she depended on multiple instructional materials, which indicates that her mediational means are object-regulated. Marisa pointed out that, in listening-speaking classes, she aimed to promote students' communicative competence, which involved two-way communication. In such classes, English was used as the medium of instruction in the hope that students would gain extensive exposure to the use of the target language. Simply put, students were encouraged to communicate with each other only in English, and teachers and students alike were not allowed to speak Thai in class. Marisa elaborated on the plausible teaching methods to use which primarily included ALM and CLT. She further added that CLT offers various advantages in theory; however, it was difficult, if not impossible, to merely adopt CLT in her own classroom owing to such limiting factors as large classes, students' low English proficiency and little motivation for communicative competence as well as their resistance to active class participation. While the textbooks she was using focused on CLT as the instructional approach, Marisa held the view that CLT per se was insufficient to equip students with improved pronunciation and intonation skills. Also, since the textbooks were divided into various language functions such as greetings, giving directions, offering help, and so on, Marisa commented that, through ALM, students were better able to recognize the words and sentences appropriate in these different situations. She thereby argued that ALM also found its place in her classroom.

Nevertheless, Marisa spent some time elucidating that the mere implementation of ALM did not necessarily guarantee success in every class. While textbooks which served as temporary others addressed the needs of most typical students, Marisa sought additional help from other source books for other groups, especially low-motivated students. She voiced her concern that students in listening-speaking classes usually remained silent, particularly

at the very first days of class, which prevented them from taking full advantage of such classes in which students were expected to contribute to each other's communicative skills through active participation. To tackle the problem, Marisa implemented a wide variety of ice breaking activities as illustrated by the following:

I always brought "the magic bag" to class. You might wonder what it was in the bag. It contained all materials that might come in handy for any creative classroom activities such as famous movie star pictures, colored pencils, and even tennis balls. You will never know how all that stuff could help me teach a class with diverse interests and backgrounds.

From that point, she added how creative activities were also helpful in both reading and writing classes. Since students needed to work collaboratively on group projects, these activities functioned as a means to help them establish a personal relationship that was of great importance to task accomplishment. It has clearly been demonstrated that these creative activities that Marisa gathered from various source books which served as temporary others enabled her and her students to get to know each other much better, and this led to a more supportive learning atmosphere in class.

7. Discussions and Implications

This section discusses the findings pertaining to Marisa's experience in her MA-TESOL program and how that teacher education program impacted her own teaching practices in the Thai EFL context. The two principal questions that were posed include: (1) What were the challenges faced when Marisa attempted to integrate what she acquired in the MA-TESOL program into a language classroom in Thailand?; (2) How did the MA-TESOL program in the US impact her subsequent teaching practices in Thailand?; and (3) How did the teacher internalize, transform, and reconceptualize her knowledge of teaching?

In relation to the first question, it was clearly revealed that some of her EFL teaching practices did not resonate with the Western theories she acquired through the MA-TESOL program, and factors underlying her practices were identified during the interview regarding how students' different learning styles that are specific to the teaching context determined the use of instructional approaches in class. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that even though communicative competence is the ultimate goal of most English language learners worldwide, CLT, which is the dominant paradigm in the US-based programs, fails to take into account the specific context in which it takes place. The detrimental consequence of this failure is explicitly demonstrated by the following quote: "It is therefore time for the profession to place methodology and Communicative Language Teaching where

they belong - in second place - and recognize that the learning context, including learner variables is the key factor in successful language learning” (Bax, 2003, p. 286). As pointed out in the interview, within the ZPD whereby students acted as temporary others, Marisa was capable of reflecting critically on her own teaching context and making well-informed decisions as to which instructional approaches should be embraced. In addition, Marisa generated the notion that teachers should possess not only the knowledge of teaching theories but also the ability and flexibility to adjust their teaching practices based on varied groups of learners so as to ensure successful teaching.

To address the second and third research questions, several aspects derived from the interview data should be recapitulated at this point. First, because Marisa had no formal teaching experience before pursuing her MA-TESOL degree in the U.S., she had a favorable impression of the program, particularly its introduction to the teaching methodologies that subsequently served as helpful preparational tools for real teaching in the Thai context. Additionally, Marisa focused on the extent to which the MA-TESOL program enabled her to put theory into practice as exemplified by how teacher educators which served as her temporary others helped her develop a strong sense of effective teaching. Interestingly, not only does the interview reflect Marisa’s beliefs about effective teaching as mentioned, but it also reveals her perception of being a good EFL teacher. Simply put, viewing one of the teacher educators as a role model, Marisa believes that enthusiasm for teaching should be deemed as one of the attributes of teachers that contributes to successful EFL teaching since it helps increase students’ motivation for learning, even in a context in which exposure to the target language is very limited. However, a few examples Marisa provided regarding how her existing beliefs and knowledge were shaped by the teacher education program and how the program failed to appreciate different teaching contexts are in agreement with other research studies in the field which argue that traditional teacher education has overlooked the set of teacher beliefs and knowledge about such aspects as language learning, and the role of teachers and students (e.g., Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Lo, 2001), which they bring to their programs from their own experiences. These inevitably affect the process of thinking, problem-solving, and decision making. Thus, opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own beliefs about effective teaching and learning are needed (Crandall, 2000).

8. Conclusions and Limitations

While the study reveals a disjuncture between the Western methodologies introduced in the US-based MA-TESOL program and the Thai EFL practices, the role of practical experience needs to be taken into consideration. Richards (1990) posited that teacher education programs should admit that teachers are central in their teaching and learning process and provide them with ample opportunities to evaluate their knowledge, theories, and principles with practical experience. In so doing, such activities as observations,

internships, apprenticeships, and student teaching should be an integral part of most teacher education programs. Even though these types of experience are found in most programs, Crandall (1996) pointed out the inadequacy of these types of experience as reported by a large number of students. Specifically, students propose that teacher education programs provide more extensive experience in order for them to link theory with practice and to gain valuable insights on the realities of the classroom under guidance and support from experienced teacher educators.

This study reaffirms what the sociocultural theory informs us about teacher beliefs and knowledge. Apart from that theory, the essence of the ZPD and mediational means are also clearly reflected throughout the study. It supports the notion that teacher development is “not smooth and linear with predetermined start and end points. Instead, it is a much more dynamic, socially mediated process that occurs as a direct result of participation in social activities” (Golombek & Johnson, 2004, pp. 309-310).

Nonetheless, many questions have still gone unanswered. It remains to be explored how Marisa’s teaching practices affected the perceptions and actual performance of the students, and how her professional future will develop. Further research which is needed will examine whether and how her beliefs and knowledge change over time as a consequence of her engagement in social interactions that corroborates this study’s subscription to the sociocultural theory.

Lastly, some limitations that prevail in this study include a lack of triangulation, prolonged engagement as well as the data analysis procedure conducted by a single coder. Also, since Marisa is the only participant in this study, it is an empirical question as to whether her perception of the MA-TESOL program is shared by others from the same program, and also to what extent the program is similar to other programs. However, the findings in the study provide some valuable insights of the participant from which teacher education programs can benefit so as to reassess their curriculum that ultimately accommodates the needs of the students with diverse cultures and backgrounds.

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Appendix

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Why were you interested in becoming an EFL teacher?
2. Did you have teaching experience before pursuing your MA TESOL degree in the U.S.? If yes, how many years and at which level?
3. Why did you decide to pursue your MA TESOL degree in the U.S.?
4. What were the reasons for choosing your particular program/institution?
5. What did you expect to gain from the program?
6. What courses did you take as required courses or elective ones? What made you choose to take those courses?
7. How did you like the courses that you took in the program?
8. Do you think that your MA TESOL program fulfilled your needs and/or expectations? Please elaborate.
9. What do you think are things in the program that could have been done differently to suit your specific needs? (e.g., how classes were taught, the contents of classes, and the number of courses required)
10. Please describe your current instructional context in Thailand. What are the subjects and the level of students you are teaching? What are the instructional approaches that you tend to use frequently in the classrooms?
11. Do you think your teaching has changed since you received the MA TESOL degree?
12. Do you think what you have acquired in the program is applicable to your teaching context in Thailand? If not, what are the challenges and/or difficulties that you faced while attempting to implement the concepts and ideas that you acquired in your MA TESOL program?
13. What are some characteristics of Thai EFL learners/classrooms that influenced your current teaching practices?
14. In what way do you think your MA TESOL program supports or hinders your teaching practices?
15. Do you think that your MA TESOL program contributes to more successful teaching in your context?
16. If someone would like to be a Thai EFL teacher and asks for your comments regarding an MA TESOL program in the U.S., how would you respond to him/her?