Why Do We Teach the Way We Teach? Two Tertiary ESL Teachers' Reflections on Their Differing Practice

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ABSTRACT

Teachers who teach the same topics sometimes teach them differently. This study used classroom observation, post-action reflection and peer discussion among teachers to gather data on differences in how two tertiary level language teachers teach the same workshops, and to share their reflections about why they teach the way they teach and in what ways can they improve. The two teachers were also the two researchers. The Constant Comparison Method was used to group the various data into eight continua along which the teachers differed. The researchers also considered the issue of whether teachers should be urged to teach in a uniform manner. This issue was discussed with reference to the two teachers, as well as to teachers generally. The authors conclude that teachers need not teach the same ways; however, they should communicate with each other about how they teach, and they should strive to support each other. The main theoretical foundation for the study derives from constructivism and the paradigm shift from behaviourism to constructivism, which in education manifests itself as student centred instruction.

KEYWORDS: teacher reflection, student centred learning, paradigm shift, variation among teachers, constructivism

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Introduction

People differ from one another in a large number of ways, including appearance, interests, skills, personality and beliefs. In education, studies have investigated how students learn differently (e.g., Jonassen, & Grabowski, 2012) and how teachers teach differently (e.g., Felder & Silverman, 1988). The current study focused on how two teachers differ in how they teach the same topics at the same tertiary institution with similar students. The study also tried to understand some of the reasons for the two teachers' differences and to draw conclusions about the pluses and minuses of differences between teachers. These conclusions are based on their observations and reflections of their own teaching.

The present paper uses the prism of the education field's paradigm shift towards constructivism (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003) to understand teaching differences between two language teachers. The paper begins by providing background on the two teachers, the institution where they teach and the topics they teach. Next, the paper describes research into differences in the teaching styles of these two teachers including the value that reflection provides in improving teaching, and then, presents and elaborates on the study's results. The discussion section of the paper contains ideas on how to handle differences among teachers.

Background

The two teachers in this study (hereafter, N and G) are the two authors of this article. They are friendly colleagues in the five-person Learning Support department at James Cook University Singapore (JCUS), where, along with one of their other colleagues, they specialise in providing language help to the university's undergraduate and graduate students and, to a much lesser extent, to their fellow members of the academic staff. As learning support teachers in JCUS, N and G's core functions are: (1) to conduct periodic English language skills workshops (e.g., improving essay writing skills) that are open to all students, (2) to be available for scheduled or walk-in face-to-face individual or group consultations to give verbal feedback on students' written assignments, (3) to conduct customised in-lecture writing workshops requested by lecturers (e.g., strategies on reflective journal writing for an MBA cohort), (4) to attend to students' feedback requests on their assignment drafts sent through email or shared via Google drive or OneDrive, and (5) to teach specific English language subjects as and when needed (JCU Singapore, 2016). N and G's focus is on improving generalist but transferrable academic writing skills that students, regardless of degree programs, characteristics and demographics, can learn from and apply in their particular writing assignments.

In more detail, the English-related aspects on which N and G help undergraduate and graduate students include: (1) improving clarity and cohesion of their writing by making them aware of the logical structure or flow of their ideas, (2) improving grammar by helping them locate sample sentences and paragraphs in their assignment drafts that depict key grammatical errors and providing them with models of better English, (3) improving sentence structure such as helping them position a key idea in the topic sentence with supplementary ideas as supporting details, (4) improving language register by avoiding the use of informal language and finding ways to reduce specialist terminology through giving brief but comprehensive definitions, (5) knowing when to use the active and passive voices in writing, (6) determining a writing approach that fits the argument and development of a topic, (7) supporting an argument with available evidence, (8) avoiding plagiarism through effective use of quotes, paraphrasing and summarising and avoiding patch writing, and (9) using APA

style in their citations and references as mandated by the university. Interestingly, N and G share similarities and differences when dealing with these English-related aspects with students in both classroom teaching and workshops (Delante, 2017). About 25% of JCUS students are from Singapore, with most of the remainder coming from other Asian countries. Depending in part on students' countries of origin, their English levels can vary. All classes and workshops at JCUS are conducted in English.

N and G have many similarities. First, both enjoy teaching; promoting education gives them a great deal of satisfaction. For instance, on weekends, N has been a volunteer teacher for migrant workers, and G volunteers with international organisations of educators. Also, both of these teachers have an affection for the written word. As a result, reading and writing are among their favourite pastimes. For instance, outside of their work, N and G both write and edit in a volunteer capacity. Another commonality is that N and G both appreciate opportunities to work with others and do their fair share in cooperative endeavours.

The two colleagues also differ in some ways. N is younger, born in 1982, whereas G was born in 1952. Not surprisingly, given this head start, G has more teaching experience, having spent about 30 years in teaching, including teaching secondary school English in the US, ESL (English as a Second Language) in a few countries and teacher education in many countries. For N, in addition to his current work in providing learning support for tertiary level students, his ten years of teaching experience include teaching English and Literature in local government universities in the Philippines and teaching General Paper in a private institute in Singapore prior to working as a learning advisor for English at JCUS.

N and G cooperate beyond the needs of their work. For instance, they lend each other fiction books and discuss those books. They also make purchases for each other, e.g., knowing that G likes traditional shirts from N's country, on a recent trip home, N bought such a shirt for G. Additionally, N and G occasionally socialise with each other outside of work. Thus, any differences in approach to teaching do not disrupt their personal relationship.

Reflection by teachers

Part of the data for the present study come from reflection by the two participants. Reflection by teachers has a long tradition (Dewey, 1933). Richards and Lockhart (2007) noted that having teachers reflect on their practice is important because it allows them to observe themselves, gather and keep data about what they do, and be more attuned to the roles they have so that they can self-assess or self-evaluate, which is instrumental for making the changes that are necessary for professional growth. The value of reflection has since been advanced by philosophers such as Dewey, Schon, Kant, Russell, Piaget and Kohler, to name a few, because it enables change and empowerment at the individual level, in educational sector and society at large (Mann, Gordon & MacLeod, 2009).

When teachers reflect, they take time to consider their actions, the reasons for their actions, the effects of their actions and the larger context in which their actions take place (Farrell, 2007). Reflection can be done alone and/or with colleagues (Farrell & Jacobs, 2016). The times at which teachers reflect can be divided into three categories: before action reflection (BAR), during action reflection (DAR) and post action reflection (PAR). BAR involves teachers in carefully considering their teaching plans. In DAR, teachers think on their feet, i.e., as they are teaching. Perhaps PAR constitutes the most common form of teacher reflection, as teachers consider the pluses and minuses, as well as the whys and wherefores of the instruction they have finished, either recently or in the past. PAR was utilised in the

current study. PAR is similar to Schon's (1983) reflection-*on*-action (ROA), a type of reflection that addresses tasks and impacts of tasks after a period of time. ROA helps teachers to develop awareness and establish a critical mind in terms of addressing issues that arise from practice (Hatton & Smith, 1995). This type of reflection is both dialogic (deliberate, cognitive and constructive) and critical (reconstructionist) in nature as it helps reflectors make informed decisions to maintain professional growth and to help students improve their skills (Etscheidt, Curran & Sawyer, 2012; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Many tools can be used to aid teacher reflection (Fendler, 2003; Hernández-Ramos, 2004). For example, teachers can record their classes, either by audio or video, and then review the recordings to promote reflection. Additionally, teachers can keep journals of their reflections on their teaching and then review what they wrote with the goal of taking their reflections to a higher level. Artefacts can also serve as resources for teachers, who can review such artefacts as their teaching notes and students' work. Peer observation and discussion provides another means of teacher reflection, because seeing how colleagues teach and holding post-observation discussions with those colleagues can help teachers generate insights into their own teaching. In this study, the researchers used classroom observation with the aid of audio recording technology to investigate their research questions. The Methodology section of the paper provides details about how the present study was conducted.

Research Questions

The present study attempted to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the differences in how the teachers taught and what are the reasons for the differences?
(2) Do they feel a need to reduce differences in their teaching?

Methodology

Participants in this study were the two researchers. They had previously observed each other's teaching, as JCUS encourages PROT (Peer Review of Teaching) during which colleagues observe each others' teaching. The main data came from audio recordings made when each of the two teachers separately taught the same two-hour workshop to prepare students for a writing assignment. After listening to both recordings, N and G worked alone to take notes and reflect on what might be distinctive about their own teaching in comparison to their colleague's teaching, and to reflect individually on why they taught in the ways observed from the data. Taking notes enabled them to create themes or conceptual categories that helped them in the analysis which led to the creation of continua. The process of taking down notes about the audio recordings followed these steps: (1) N and G listened to each other's recordings and took down notes, (2) they met to discuss their notes with each other, (3) they listened again to the recordings for some points that their notes disagreed, and (4) they met again to discuss and categorise the themes that emerged from the recordings. Transcribing the audio recordings was not undertaken due to the bureaucratic procedures involved in seeking a research budget. In discussing their notes and reflections, N and G utilised the Constant Comparison Method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to generate concepts that describe some of their differences in teaching approach. The Constant Comparison Method is a qualitative research method that seeks to inductively derive categories from data. The method draws its name from the fact that emerging categories are constantly compared with the data to see if they are faithful to those data. In the case of the present study, the categories took the form of continua, as the researchers wished to emphasise the non-dichotomous

nature of the comparison between them. The next section of this paper explains the eight continua that emerged from this analysis.

Results

This section of the paper reports the results of the research. In answer to Research Question #1, the two participants did indeed teach differently, and they were able to articulate reasons for those differences. Based on their analysis of the data using the Constant Comparative Method, their reflections and their discussions, the researchers developed eight continua which represent some of the differences in how they teach Learning Support workshops. These continua were:

(1) seriousness - silliness
(2) exercises –games
(3) learning alone - learning with peers
(4) exclusive focus on content - teacher self-disclosure
(5) resource provider – resource co-discoverer
(6) teachers as provider of materials - students providing some of their own materials
(7) focus on the short term – focus on the long term
(8) use of new technology – use of older technology.

The continua answer Research Question #1. Each continuum is described below. In continua 1-7, the right-hand term fits with the student centred paradigm in education.

Seriousness -- Silliness

A serious approach to teaching does not mean that teachers never smile and that laughter is banned. Instead, seriousness means that teachers attempt to invoke a serious tone in the hope that this will best promote students' engagement with learning. N prefers taking such a serious route toward encouraging student engagement, in the belief that when teachers show a firm focus on their teaching, students will become similarly focused, rather than joking around and going off topic. The view is that such single mindedness on teachers' part may lead students to believe that what is being taught has value. As a result, students will be more motivated to focus on their assigned tasks and learn more. However, upon reflection, N realised that his seriousness may have led him to talk too much in the workshop instead of giving students the chance to engage in the material through student-student interaction.

Just as a serious approach to teaching does not mean never smiling, a silly approach to teaching does not mean never being serious. Instead, it means looking for and seeking to evoke occasional moments of light-heartedness. G agrees with Harari (2008) and Tegano, Groves, and Catron (1999) who believe that a small amount of playfulness may promote student engagement in the serious business of learning. Thus, G looks for ways to inject an occasional dash of silliness into his teaching in hopes of adding some surprise and of encouraging students to step away from their often fairly passive roles in the classroom.

For instance, in the workshop recorded for this research, G introduced students to the OWL (Online Writing Lab)'s website on APA (American Psychological Association) referencing, the system used at JCUS. He began by asking students, "What animals make the sound 'meow'?" After students correctly answered "Cats", G started laughing, and then he asked the class, "What animals, other than hyenas, make that sound?" After students figured out that G was referring to humans, G made an owl sound, and when students identified owls as

the animals who make that sound, G explained that he was going to introduce students to their very own owl, a virtual animal companion who is available 24 hours a day to answer 95% of their questions with APA referencing. Then, G showed students the section of the OWL website that explains APA referencing. Another way that G attempted to inject humour into the workshop was by leading students in a laughter exercise (Kataria, 1999).

After some discussion, N and G agreed that their experiences as students shaped their views on the seriousness-silliness continuum. Whereas many of G's most esteemed teachers in the US were those who liked to joke around in class, for N in the Philippines, his teachers' prestige was often linked to the gravitas they brought to their teaching. In G's experience, the teachers who joked with students tended to be the ones who seemed to care more about students. In contrast, for N, the more serious his teachers were, the more they wanted students to do well.

Exercises --- Games

Similar to the seriousness - silliness continuum is the continuum along which lie exercises and games, with exercises linking to seriousness and games linking to silliness. However, the same activity can be an exercise in one teacher's class and a game in another teacher's. The difference between exercises and games lies to a large extent in how teachers and students frame the activities. For instance, here is an activity from the workshop both colleagues do on APA referencing. Participants' task is to identify which option shows correct APA referencing for a journal article. [Note: the correct answer is choice c.]

a. Gilquin, G., & Jacobs, G. M. 2006. Elephants who marry mice are very unusual: The use of the relative pronoun *who* with nonhuman animals. *Society & Animals, 14*(1**)**, 79-105**.**
b. Gilquin, G., & Jacobs, G. M. (2006). 'Elephants who marry mice are very unusual: The use of the relative pronoun *who* with nonhuman animals.' *Society & Animals, 14*(1**)**, 79-105**.**
c. Gilquin, G., & Jacobs, G. M. (2006). Elephants who marry mice are very unusual: The use of the relative pronoun *who* with nonhuman animals. *Society & Animals, 14*(1**)**, 79-105**.**
d. Gilquin, G., & Jacobs, G. M. (2006). Elephants who marry mice are very unusual: The use of the relative pronoun *who* with nonhuman animals. *Society & Animals,* 14(1**)**, 79-105**.**

In keeping with his focus on seriousness, N is more likely to conduct the above activity as an exercise which students do alone. In contrast, in keeping with his search for opportunities to inject a bit of silliness, G likes to adopt the tone of a game show host and conduct the activity as a non-competitive game (Gee, 2013). In that spirit, he encourages students to cheer for groups with correct answers, although he does not talk about winners and losers, nor does he encourage students to keep score.

Students learning alone --- Students learning in groups

Some experts in education advise teachers to make small group activities (groups consist of 2-4 students) a regular and significant part of their teaching (e.g., Webb, et al., 2009), and there is research suggesting both cognitive and affective benefits of student-student interaction (Slavin, 1991). These benefits have been found in the teaching of a wide range of subjects and with students of many ages and nationalities (e.g., Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000). However, N and many other teachers are wary of group activities for a few reasons. First, the social element of groups can divert students' attention from learning. This social element can, they fear, dilute the seriousness of the classroom, and the class can descend into a pandemic of socialising silliness. Second, some students prefer to study alone, perhaps due

to past negative experiences with groups, e.g., partners who did not do their fair share or others who dominated the group. Third, setting up groups and facilitating group interaction can take time away from covering key content points. Fourth, groups can flounder as they struggle to work out how to coordinate their efforts (Sarkisian, 2010). Such coordination can be especially difficult when students are unfamiliar with their group mates, as is often the case in Learning Support workshops for which participants vary each time, and for which some students arrive late or leave early.

Thus, while N encourages students to interact, he does not set aside time to facilitate this student-student interaction. For instance, in the workshop recorded for this study, N invited students to work with peers, but none of them did. Therefore, to optimise time and to meet the workshop objectives, N resorted to students working alone, and most of the class consisted of N lecturing to explain and exemplify key points.

While acknowledging the potential obstacles to successful group activities, G persists. The tactics G used to promote successful peer interaction in the workshop studied here included icebreaking activities, explanation of why he was asking students to learn in groups, gentle nudging of students who seemed reluctant to work with a partner, use of twosomes rather than larger groups, requests for students to share their partner's work or ideas rather than their own, praise for students who interacted with peers and use of doable tasks so that groups were likely to succeed, and, thus, feel comfortable in their newly formed groups. In his personal and professional lives, G has seen great benefit from peer collaboration and sees it as a lifelong learning strategy vital to students' future success (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2014).

Exclusive focus on content --- Teacher self-disclosure

Should teachers concentrate on the key points of the workshop, or should they add a judicious amount of self-disclosure (Stoltz, Young, & Bryant, 2014)? Different teachers have different opinions on this (Cayanus & Martin, 2008). In another instance of his emphasis on seriousness, N worries that telling students information about himself takes the focus away from the topic of the workshop; thus, he maintains some professional distance (Valentino, 1995) from students to emphasise that teaching to him is business, not personal. On the other hand, G hopes that briefly telling students about himself will lead to a better workshop for two reasons. First, his self-disclosure may enhance the atmosphere, as students may feel closer to the workshop facilitator and thus want to try harder to make the workshop a success. Second, if G self-discloses, students may be more willing to self-disclose, such as to share their ideas and concerns. One way that G self discloses is by using his life or his work in examples, such as the fact that he likes mangoes, or in the APA game above, an article he co-authored is used.

In the workshop that the two teachers recorded, both used self-disclosure, although G used it more often. For both teachers, self-disclosure focused on their writing. Both shared experiences with their own writing that they felt might be of use to the students, e.g., how to find and keep track of references in academic writing.

Although G believes that teacher self-disclosure can be beneficial, he has experienced its negative consequences. For example, when G was a graduate student, one day a professor talked about his disagreements with a famous professor in the same field, and some of these disagreements had nothing to do with the field. Even though that lecture took place in the

early 1980s, G still remembers the disagreements but very little else from the professor's lectures. Thus, it may be that teachers' self-disclosure promotes learning only when self-disclosures are relevant (Zardeckaite-Matulaitiene & Paluckaite, 2013).

Resource provider -- Resource co-discoverer

In this information age, teachers' role as information providers has become potentially less important. Rather than dispensing information to students, teachers need to enable students to find and properly use resources which allow them to find information and ideas on their own. One way to teach students the joys of and paths towards finding resources involves teachers co-discovering with students. G did this in the workshop by asking students to nominate a topic and then using JCU's databases and Google Scholar to locate relevant sources. N does something similar. However, both N and G find that some students may be reluctant to participate in self-directed learning (Gibbons, 2002) and, instead, may prefer that teachers provide the key information, with these students playing the traditional role of absorbers of the information provided by their teachers (Boud, 2012).

Looking at the resource provider vs. resource co-discoverer continuum with regard to the APA referencing workshops that N and G do, N feels a responsibility, as a serious teacher, to walk students through examples of the main types of references they likely need to create in their academic work. N hopes that by providing students this foundation, he is enabling them to be more independent. N believes that proper examples of APA citations with matching references must be shown to students because students struggling to search for relevant materials are likely to resort to plagiarism. . More importantly, N tries to share examples of an original paragraph with a badly written paraphrase or summary and an acceptable paraphrase or summary. The intention is to enable students to pick up skills while maintaining the original meaning of the passage. By doing this, N believes that students become more aware of plagiarism and learn effective paraphrasing and summarising to avoid it.

G is more willing to take a chance that students, after an example or two from him, will be willing to find information on their own. Thus, in the workshop on APA referencing, G demonstrates how to do references for journal articles, highlighting features such as spaces, capital letters and italics. For the other types of references, he only brings students' attention to the left frame of the OWL website's APA page. Then, for these other types of references, such as those for books and websites, students work with partners while G monitors their work. When students make mistakes, rather than correcting students' errors, G encourages them to revisit the webpage. G believes that students do have the capacity to do things on their own and discover learning by themselves with a little dose of stimulation and inspiration from him.

Given these differences as to how much information to provide students, it is not surprising that the audio recordings showed N speaking almost all the time and G speaking about 50% of the time. N did invite students to speak, e.g., to ask questions, but students did not step forward to do so. As a result, N presented students with much more information than did G. Furthermore, as a standard practice of Learning Support, the two teachers sent their presentation slides to the lecturer of the subject, and these slides were posted for students to download.

Teachers as provider of materials -- Students providing some of their own materials

The previous continuum involves whether teachers should provide students with most of the resources they need or whether teachers should mostly model information mining and ask students to find the majority of their resources independently of teachers. A related issue is whether serious, well-prepared teachers should provide all the materials students will need, or should students be encouraged to bring or create some materials, either in hard or soft copy? Student-supplied materials potentially increase the relevance of the materials, and as a result, may increase students' motivation (Jacobs, 2013). Unfortunately, students may fail to bring materials or bring materials that are not optimal for the tasks in which they are engaged. In general, when students have more control, they also have more room to fail, but the hope is that students will learn from those failures. Perhaps, students benefit from failure, as it may grow their "Adversity Quotient" (Stoltz, 1997), i.e., their ability to respond positively to difficulties and failures.

G is more willing than N to risk that students may not find or bring materials. For example, in the APA referencing workshop used in this study, he set aside time for students to write references for works that they were using in their assignments. However, not all students had started their assignments, or they were not yet skilled at finding works to cite. Thus, the time G allotted to referencing practice could easily become off-task time that students used for checking non-relevant social media or other non-curricular behaviours. N avoided this potential problem by supplying some materials for workshop exercises. For instance, N projected the relevant pages of a book or journal on a classroom wall and asked students to undertake citation and referencing exercises using those materials. Also, in another essay writing workshop, N jumbled some sentences written in both active and passive voice and asked students to group the sentences according to whether they were active or passive voice. He further asked students to identify the relevance of using the active voice in writing and in which conditions the passive voice was necessary. N makes it a point to have back up materials when he is teaching because of his personal observation that some students depend on teachers for resource materials. Also, finding their own materials may take away a significant amount of class time. Although this may encourage dependency in the long run, N is aware of the opportunities for students to find materials on their own, and he does not close his doors to tap this opportunity in some of his classes.

While N supplies the materials students will need, G does not. For instance, G left blanks in the presentation he prepared for the class, e.g., one slide had the heading "Sources of references", but the rest of the slide was blank, and the class was to work together to fill in the blank slide for different sources. As a result of this, some information might have been left out if students did not supply it and G forgot it, and G might appear to the students to be unprepared. In contrast, N's slides were replete with information and contained no blanks. G's strategy invites a co-sharing of learning which illustrates a more constructivist belief in teaching - that when students are made aware that they hold a key part in creating their learning, they will more likely increase their engagement, which in turn makes learning more meaningful to them.

Focus on the short term -- Focus on the long term

This continuum involves whether teachers emphasise (a) giving students a bowl of rice or (b) teaching students to grow their own rice. Driven by his seriousness in teaching, N makes it a point that the workshops he conducts with students are tailored to students' short term needs, i.e., how to do well on a particular upcoming written assignment. For instance, in a workshop he does every term for students enrolled in an Anthropology subject, N focuses on teaching

students to develop main ideas that can be elaborated in body paragraphs based on the given question or topic. Also, N provides assignment-related examples of paragraphs using the present tense, as present tense is required in that assignment to emphasise the "sense of now". While N expects students to later be able to transfer what they learn for a particular assignment to future tasks, N's main goal in his workshops is for students to meet the expected language, structure and organisation requirements of their current assignment. N does this because of his observation that some students lose focus in writing. Going off topic affects their grades; thus, N sees to it that students are on track when they write specific assignments for a specific subject. G, although equally aware of the grading rubrics for particular assignments, concentrates on the learning processes, not learning products, in hopes of promoting the skills and attitudes consistent with students becoming life long, self-directed learners. Therefore, he uses varied strategies to enable students to take control of their learning. Peer feedback is one of these strategies. Rather than G being the only person providing feedback during the workshop, he asks students to also be involved in providing feedback to their peers (Raimes, 1983). G's goal is to expand learning and make students more autonomous (Borg & Al-Busaidi, 2012).

Use of new technology --- Use of older technology

Every year, many new technology tools become available to aid learning and teaching. However, new technology tools require time for students and teachers to learn and often suffer teething problems. Among N and G, N is certainly the one who most quickly adopts new hardware and software. For instance, when providing feedback on students' assignment drafts, N uses not only email but also OneDrive and Google docs collaboration that many of the students are using. Also, while G continues to utilise the PowerPoint software for creating workshop slides, N uses Prezi, a presentation software with a more modern look. For brief online quizzes that can stimulate student engagement, N utilises Kahoot and Socrative, two apps that allow real-time analytics of students' online performance. Fortunately, N readily shares his technology knowledge with G, who is slowly trying new tools. Using the latest technology gives N's workshops a 'wow' factor that may increase student engagement (Beauchamp & Parkinson, 2005). Furthermore, students may view the fact that N took the time to master new technology as additional proof of the seriousness with which he takes his teaching.

As to Research Question #2, whether the two teacher participants in the study felt that they should attempt to teach in a more uniform manner, as will be discussed at greater length in the next two sections of this paper, they both felt that each of their two approaches to teaching were legitimate, and that it was fine to continue teaching differently, as long as they reflected on and discussed their teaching approaches.

Discussion

This study identified eight continua along which two teachers differ in how they teach. In general, G's teaching was more in line with the student centred paradigm in education, while N's teaching followed a more traditional approach. Given these differences, a primary issue raised by this study is whether teachers should be allowed to go their separate ways, e.g., should N and G be allowed to teach the workshops the way they wish, or should more uniformity be imposed? Guild (2001) offered perhaps a compromise position, "We need to decide intentionally what should be uniform for all students and what should be diverse and strive toward putting into practice what we say we believe" (n.p.).

Is there one right way to teach the workshops, courses, etc. or at least a better way? Should the two colleagues use various tools to conduct research on this question, with both of them agreeing to teach in the manner which seems best according to the research? Alternatively, they could turn to the other Learning Support staff or to their reporting officer for a decision. The next two paragraphs explain some of the pluses of uniformity and some of the pluses of diversity in teaching styles.

Several advantages may result when teachers who teach the same workshops, courses, etc. all teach in the same way. Firstly, uniformity saves time, because one set of materials can be planned and used by all, whereas N and G now spend time modifying each other's plans and materials. Secondly, although students are not directly assessed after N and G's workshops, the topics they teach, such as the topic of how to include an introduction in an essay, form part of the assessment in the subjects students take. This raises the issue of equivalence, i.e., is it fair to use the same criteria to assess students when the students' preparation differs? Thirdly, lack of uniformity among teachers may pose challenges to those assessing the two teachers, for instance, after every workshop, N and G request students to complete feedback forms. Thus, students may be judging N and G not on the quality of their teaching, such as whether they are well organised and explain concepts clearly, but on their teaching method, e.g., students who do not like to do group activities may give G's workshops a lower rating. Lastly, with education systems facing the task of teaching huge numbers of students, uniformity may be seen to be a realistic approach that drives teaching efficiency and equality across courses, institutions and campuses (Guild, 2001).

At the same time, advantages may arise from teachers pursuing their own approach to teaching. Firstly, teachers may feel more comfortable teaching in ways with which they are accustomed. Secondly, students may benefit from exposure to different styles of teaching, both to increase students' learning flexibility and to fit a wider range of students' learning preferences. Thirdly, maybe teaching style differences are fairly minor points. Instead, more crucial factors in evaluating teachers may include: (a) teachers understanding of the content they teach; (b) teachers' understanding of their students, such as the students' prior knowledge and experiences in education; and (c) teachers' grasp of the socio-cultural milieu in which they teach, including the institution and larger society. Fourthly, allowing differences among teachers fits with an overall society shift towards accepting and even encouraging diversity (Nacoste, 2015).

When discussing whether to permit teachers freedom of choice in their teaching, many questions arise. Here, three of these questions will be raised, but not answered, as the authors do not have answers for them. One question is: How much scope for variance is permitted to practitioners of other professions? For instance, recently, G was treated for a cold by two different doctors at the same clinic. The two doctors were approximately the same age and had graduated from the same prestigious university, yet they differed as to which antibiotic to prescribe and which other medicines to use to treat G's congested nasal passages.

A second question regarding teachers' freedom of choice also involves comparison of teaching with other professions. If some professions do indeed have more stringent standardisation than teaching, what are the reasons for this? Is education less standardised due to greater complexity in the education field (e.g., the students with whom teachers work with differ more than the building materials used by architects), to lower consequences of ineffective teaching (e.g., people might die if architects design a building ineffectively; yet no one is likely to die as an immediate consequence of a poorly designed English lesson) or to

yet other reasons? A third question might be whether if teachers are allowed variance in teaching, should there be any limits on that variance? N and G know of very knowledgeable teachers who did not have their contracts renewed because the teaching institution was not satisfied with their teaching.

Implications of the Study

Overall, the reflections of both teachers who conducted this study enabled them to experience some light bulb moments, that is, why should teachers promote differences in teaching and in what other ways can these differences lead to professional growth and students' success. Cox, Black, Heney and Keith (2015), Bailey and Garner (2010), Lee (2010) and Lee (1999) have posited that if teachers want their students to produce quality learning outcomes in particular and be more independent, self-directed and empowered learners in general, an engaging and facilitative learning environment built within cognitive development, motivation and a culture of guidance, facilitation and support that tolerates differences has to be put in place.

As this is a reflective paper, the analysis and discussion are subjective and personal. Credit to most reflective studies, this study does not pretend to be anything other than a reflection of each other's teaching, in which, analysis has been largely drawn from a personal journey as well as an interpersonal sharing of teaching practices based on classroom observation including office talks. Although reflection remains a contested space, teachers should have an optimistic attitude to pursue it as a learning tool if they aim for change and progress.

Conclusion

This article has examined differences in teaching styles between two teachers, the authors of the article, who teach the same academic writing workshops at the same university. After providing background on the two teachers and describing how data were collected on differences in their teaching, the article described some of those differences and the theory behind them. Then, advantages and disadvantages of differences among teachers' teaching approaches were considered and the overall issue of work style variance among professionals was discussed.

In conclusion, the authors believe that in their particular case, it will be fine for them to continue to teach differently, as long as they continue to share resources, to communicate about their teaching and the rationale for that, and to strive to promote the learning of their students and a culture of learning and collaboration in their institution. Reflecting on teaching practices is a constructive exercise. It enables teachers to be more circumspect of their roles, beliefs and personalities and be more enlightened to recalibrate their pedagogical strategies based on the circumstances that are unique in their teaching context, such as their shared similarities and differences in teaching. Teaching is both an art and a science (Marzano, 2007). It is an endeavour which provides myriad puzzles for teachers to undertake, which offers teachers a variety of canvases on which to paint and which supplies teachers with a variety of means for expressing their passion for promoting learning. Long live that variety and that passion!

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