

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the first part of this section, the development of writing instruction is discussed, and two of the approaches, process-oriented and product-oriented approaches, are focused on. These two approaches are usually compared and contrasted. It has been believed that the product-oriented approach dominates in Taiwan. However, the dispute over approaches or other observable behavior, such as students' grades, is not sufficient. The more important issue is the teachers' beliefs toward instruction. Therefore, the second part of the thesis delineates the importance of doing research on teachers' beliefs and practices, examines the definition, sources, characteristics of teachers' beliefs, relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices, and factors that influence teachers' beliefs and practices, and presents possible factors affecting the incongruity between beliefs and practices. Then, related research on teachers' beliefs and practices of instruction, especially that of writing instruction, is dealt with. Toward the end of this section, the need to do this research is pointed out and the research questions are presented.

2.1 The Development of ESL/EFL Writing Instruction

Since the formation of the TESOL organization forty years ago in 1966, issues concerning teaching English to speakers of other languages, including the teaching of writing, have been offered a channel for discussion. During this time, a variety of approaches or teaching methods have emerged. However, researchers in this field do not come to an agreement as to what approaches stand for the major trend at a specific period of time or what approaches are the most effective ones for learners learning

English or teachers teaching English as a second or foreign language. Each researcher interprets the development of writing instruction from his or her own perspective.

Raimes (1996) examined approaches to L2 writing instruction and summarized four approaches, each having a distinctive focus. She provided only the approximate starting point of these approaches, but no final dates, since these approaches are still being utilized at the present time. Starting from 1966, the first approach she mentioned is the product approach, which focuses on form. At the moment, the audio-lingual method was the dominant instruction mode. Therefore, writing meant sentence drills such as fill-ins and substitutions. In addition, correct grammatical forms were highly emphasized. The concept of contrastive rhetoric was also included in this period. In addition to grammatical forms, proponents of contrastive rhetoric took into account English textual features. They dealt with issues of introductory paragraphs, topic sentences, cohesion and coherence, and discourse analysis. The second approach, starting from about 1976, was the process approach, which focuses on the writer. It can be viewed as a protest against the former approach. Instead of focusing on the final product learners produce, this approach has an interest in what L2 writers actually do when they write. Ideas of process, making meaning, invention, multiple drafts, and peer evaluation are introduced. Before students have opportunities to generate ideas, teachers are not recommended to provide outlines or main ideas for them. Moreover, linguistic accuracy is downplayed at least at the beginning of the writing process. The third approach, which started from 1986, has a focus on content and is often referred to as the content-based approach. With this approach, an ESL course is usually attached to a content course. That is, English is seen as a means of learning other disciplines. The fourth approach, academically oriented approach, focuses on the reader. It emerged almost simultaneously with the content-based

approach. According to Reid (1987), “teachers must gather assignments from across the curriculum, assess the purposes and audience expectations in the assignments, and present them to the class” (p. 34). To sum up, the four approaches focus on form, the writer, content, and the reader respectively.

Other researchers look at the development of approaches to ESL/EFL writing instruction differently. Richards (2002), based on 30-year experience in TEFL/TESL, stated that 1970s was a time for controlled composition, which sought to prevent errors and develop correct writing habits. Later the focus shifted to the paragraph-writing approach with a focus on topic sentences, supporting sentences, transitions, and different functional patterns. In the 1990s, process writing introduced a new dimension into writing instruction, putting emphasis on the writer. More recently, the second language writing field has been influenced by a genre approach. This approach probes the relations between writer, reader, and text. Controlled composition is equal to the product approach, and paragraph-writing approach is related to contrastive rhetoric, which is under the product approach mentioned by Raimes (1996).

Several researchers in Taiwan have interpreted the approaches from different angles. For example, Feng (2000) evaluated the historical background, teaching philosophies, teaching modes and research outcomes of the following four approaches, and further made concise comments. The first one is controlled composition, also known as guided composition. The second is the contrastive rhetoric approach based on Kaplan’s (1966) view that every language has a unique inner logic and thought pattern. The third one is process approach, viewing writing process as a recursive one instead of a linear one. Therefore, multiple drafts, teacher-student conference and peer revision are weighed. The last one is content-based approach, aimed at training

students' study skills and writing strategies.

2.2 Product-oriented Approach & Process-oriented Approach

Of all the approaches, product-oriented approach and process-oriented approach are compared and contrasted most frequently, either in Taiwan or abroad (Chen, 2001). The argument started about 30 years ago after the latter appeared to deal with the deficiencies of the former. Basically, product-oriented approach is looked upon as the inferior one, while process-oriented approach the superior one.

According to Susser (1994), with product approach, writing instruction was more or less grammar instruction, "with the emphasis on controlled composition, correction of the product, and correct form over expression of ideas" (p. 36). The roles teachers play are models that dominate the whole class and correct students' vocabulary and grammar errors of their finished text. It is believed that by doing so, students will learn the correct forms and write satisfactory composition.

As for the process-oriented approach, writing is not a linear, but a recursive cognitive process. It mainly involves complex movement among planning, composing, revising and editing (Yi, 1998). Also, Zamel (1982) indicated, during the writing process, writers are endowed with the rights to jot down informal notes or points, not having to know from the very beginning what they are going to write. The primary role of an instructor, as Holaday (1997) suggested, is that of a coach, not a judge. Teachers are more like facilitators that assist students in their writing process than models that give commands and correction all the time. Actually, the term, process-oriented approach, serves today as an umbrella term for many kinds of writing courses. Under this approach, student writers engage in writing tasks through a cyclical approach, not a single-shot approach (Kroll, 2001).

Research on writing instruction has revealed that teachers in Taiwan usually adopt a product-oriented approach. Based on Chen, D. W.'s (1997, 1998) research on 58 college composition instructors, 75.9% of the respondents believed that correcting grammar and words help students write better, and 53.5% of them considered correct use of grammar and words an important factor for students' composition to be acceptable. As a result, writing instructors at the college level in Taiwan do invest plenty of time and energy correcting grammatical mistakes and wordings. The survey revealed a typical product-oriented approach. However, though most of these instructors (77.6%) found teaching writing interesting, 89.7% wished to teach other courses. It seemed that this traditional approach, product-oriented approach, had imposed heavy workload on the teachers and frustrated them. Therefore, he advised that the new approach, process-oriented approach, be considered. In his opinion, a score offered limited information. Two factors, organization skills and writing expertise, were involved in an EFL/ESL writing performance.

High school writing instruction is more or less the same. According to Chao's (1998) surveys and interviews, high school teachers in Taiwan still used controlled composition model and product approach in their classrooms. Many teachers believed that language is learned from habit formation, and writing is designed to reinforce grammar, spellings and sentence structures. Writing teachers tend to believe that the more time they spend on correcting students' papers, the better the students' writing products will be. Actually, this approach has proved to be time-consuming and not efficient.

Nevertheless, Chen, Y. M. (1998) expressed a different viewpoint. She looked back on the papers presented in the *Conferences on English Teaching and Learning in the Republic of China* from 1984 to 1997 and summarized the approaches to writing

instruction in Taiwan. She concluded that during the first few years after composition was included in the college entrance exams in 1982, the main goal of writing instruction was to guide students to write articles of correct grammar and vocabulary use. As more learning theories were introduced, many teachers began to adopt a more inspirational approach, taking care of the writing process and integrating media in the classrooms. This proved to be a more efficient way.

Despite the seemingly favorable status of the process-oriented approach, there is a need to keep in mind the fact that “process is not the end; it is the means to the end” (Brown, 2001, p. 337). Emphasis should be put on both product and process. Thus, in collecting data of this research, the researcher took into consideration the principles and instruction techniques included in the product-oriented and the process-oriented approaches.

2.3 Teachers’ Beliefs and Practices

Though the debate between approaches has lasted for decades, it seems that there is no definite solution to the problems writing instructors face. In fact, discussing approaches itself is inadequate for understanding and improving writing instruction. Teachers’ beliefs in writing instruction deserve to be probed. Through the analysis of the underlying beliefs, teachers’ classroom practices can be re-examined. The influence of the writing instructors’ beliefs on their practices and vice versa can offer a better understanding of the writing instruction.

2.3.1 Teachers’ Beliefs

Before teachers’ beliefs are discussed, first, the definition of beliefs needs to be clarified. In fact, researchers have expressed a variety of thoughts (Goodenough, 1963;

Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968; Sigel, 1985). Goodenough (1963) described beliefs as propositions that are considered true and that serve as guidelines for making decisions and passing judgment on others' behaviors. Rokeach (1968) perceived beliefs as any conscious or unconscious proposition that can be inferred from what a person says or does. Nisbett and Ross (1980) referred to beliefs as explicit proposition about "the characteristics of objects and object classes" (p. 28). Sigel (1985) defined beliefs as "mental constructions of experience" (p. 351). They are often condensed and integrated into concepts that are held to be true and that guide behavior. In sum, beliefs are unconscious or conscious propositions that are formed based on one's experience and are considered true. They play a pivotal role in guiding behavior (Calderhead, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996).

As Clark and Peterson (1986) proposed, the process of teaching involves two major domains, teachers' thought processes, and teachers' actions and their observable effects. Teachers' thought processes, including beliefs, are inside teachers' heads, and therefore are unobservable, while teachers' actions and their observable effects are more obvious and more easily measured (Figure 2.1). As to the definition of teachers' conceptual frameworks, the expression and scope are diverse (Breen et al., 2001; Johnson, 1994). Terms used range from beliefs, principles, intuitive or implicit theories to professional craft knowledge. In this study, the term, teachers' beliefs, is adopted. Teachers' beliefs are "highly personal ways in which a teacher understands classrooms, students, the nature of learning, teacher's role in a classroom, and the goals of education" (Kagan, 1990, p. 423). That is to say, every teacher has his or her unique set of beliefs.

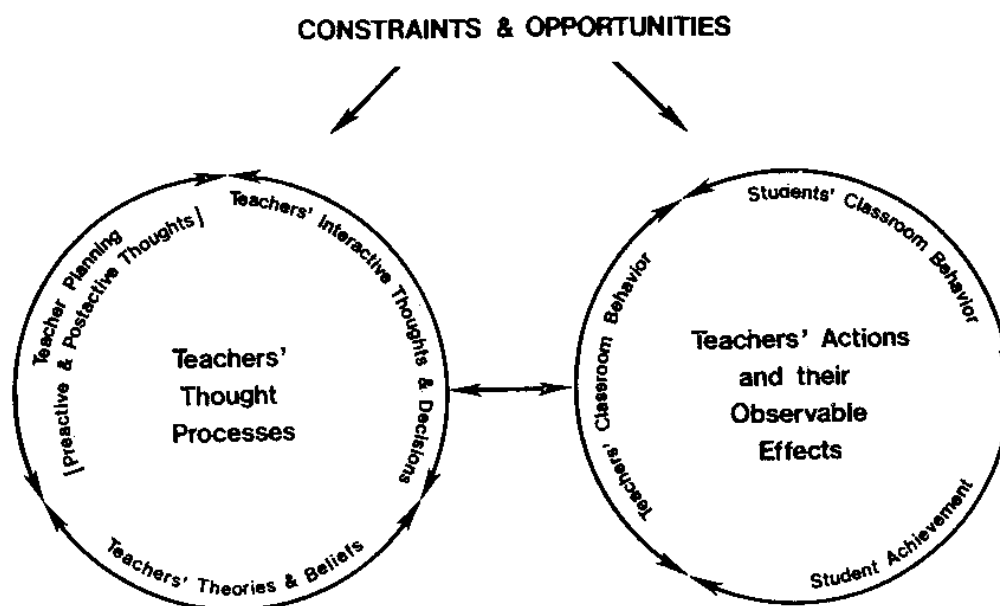


Figure 2.1 A model of teacher thought and action (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 257)

In the field of second or foreign language pedagogy, teachers' beliefs vary from person to person, too (Shi & Cumming, 1995). According to their study on five experienced writing instructors, each teacher displayed a unique, distinct set of personal conceptions about writing instruction although they were from similar educational background. To take the curriculum change in second language writing in the study for example, the teachers accommodated or resisted it according to their personal beliefs, founded on their past experience, reflection, and received information. Despite the uniqueness of teachers' beliefs, teachers have been found to hold significant beliefs that can be categorized into five main areas, including beliefs about learners and learning, beliefs about teaching, beliefs about subjects, beliefs about learning to teach, and beliefs about self and the teaching role (Calderhead, 1996).

2.3.2 Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

The effects of teachers' beliefs on classroom behaviors or practices have been

recognized. Nespor (1987) claimed that teachers' beliefs play a major role in defining teaching tasks and organizing the knowledge and information relevant to those tasks. That is, teachers' beliefs form the basis for them to choose the content and approach of instruction. Another researcher, Pajares (1992), stated that teachers' beliefs are useful in understanding their behaviors. Clark and Peterson (1986) even suggested the reciprocal relationship between teachers' thoughts and actions. Therefore, a better understanding of teachers' beliefs is needed to understand why teachers do what they do and then improve the status quo. It will significantly contribute to enhancing educational effectiveness (Brophy & Good, 1974).

In putting their beliefs into practice, teachers are faced with constraints and opportunities (Clark & Peterson, 1986). On the one hand, teachers may be constrained by the school, the principal, the community, or the curriculum. On the other hand, they may be given rare opportunities to behave in a certain way. For example, a teacher may have one textbook in mind as the most suitable one for his/her students. However, it has been predetermined by the school authorities that another book is to be used for the semester. In that case, the teacher has no choice but to abandon his/her own plan and follow the policy, which is a form of constraint. Another teacher may be given more freedom to teach the way he/she likes, and this is considered an opportunity.

Surrounded by the constraints and opportunities, sometimes teachers' classroom practices do not completely correspond to their beliefs. Dobson and Dobson (1983) stated that belief-practice congruency is essential for good teaching. Unfortunately, inconsistency does occur between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices (Schon, 1983). Once the inconsistency becomes large, learners will receive confusing messages, and this will undermine learning outcomes and teaching effectiveness. As

Nien (2002) suggested, the consistency between teachers' beliefs and classroom practices seems to be a critical element of effective teaching. This leads to the need to do a study on the congruency or inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and practices. In this way, both the effectiveness of teachers' teaching and students' learning will be enhanced.

2.3.3 Possible Reasons for the Inconsistency Between Beliefs and Practices

Empirical studies have revealed some factors that may cause the discrepancy between language teachers' beliefs and practices. Duffy and Anderson (1984) studied eight reading teachers and found that only four of them consistently employed practices that directly reflected their beliefs. The influential factors cited included the need to follow a prescribed curriculum, a lack of suitable resources, and the students' ability levels. Moreover, some possible factors were classified into five main categories in Chen (2005)'s study: student, school context, teacher, material, and exam. The student factor consists of seven subcategories: proficiency level, motivation, attitude, reaction, need, grade, and gender. The school context factor can be divided into four subcategories: scheduling, large class sizes, time limitation, and limited resources. The teacher factor includes prior teachers' instruction and fatigue. Instruction is composed of teachers, students and the curriculum. When it comes to teaching writing, a crucial element is composition evaluation. Therefore, among the factors mentioned above, the following sources of difficulties were considered in this study: curriculum, students' proficiency level and motivation, material selection, compilation and teaching preparation, and difficulties teachers faced when grading students' composition.

2.3.4 Factors Related to Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

Where do teachers' beliefs come from? Johnson (1994) found that teachers' beliefs may be based mostly on images of their formal language learning experience, images of their informal language learning experiences, images of themselves as teachers, and images of the teacher preparation program. Among these images, the first ones count most. According to Richardson (1996), beliefs are from personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction, and experience with formal knowledge. Personal experience comes from one's understanding of personal, familial, schooling, societal, and cultural conditions; experience with schooling and instruction is one's previous experience as a student; experience with formal knowledge means encounter of what is agreed on within the field as worthwhile and valid. Breen et al. (2001) traced beliefs to teachers' professional training, and their experiences as both learners from early childhood on and during their career as teachers.

Since teachers' beliefs are formed depending on their background experiences, there is a need to examine those background factors. Chung (2003) reviewed eleven foreign empirical studies (Almarza, 1996; Borg, 1998; Crandall, 2000; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Graden, 1996; Graves, 2000; Grossman, 1990, 1991; Johnson, 1994; Williams & Burns, 1997; Woods, 1996) and presented ten factors that might influence teachers' beliefs. They are learning experiences, teacher education, teaching experiences, teachers' suggestions, colleagues' suggestions, students' motivational needs and performance, teaching contexts, knowledge about English, and pre-training knowledge. Among these factors, learning experiences, teacher education, teaching experiences were found to be the major ones, with 9, 7, and 8 studies supporting them respectively.

There are several related studies in Taiwan, at the elementary school and the high

school levels. In Tang's (1993) study on elementary school teachers' belief and behavior, years of teaching and educational background were found to be the most influential factors. What is more, Lin (1990), in his study of educational beliefs of elementary school teachers, concluded that teaching experiences played a crucial role in developing beliefs. At the high school level, including junior and senior high schools, Chang (2005) indicated that age, years of teaching, students they taught, self-training time of listening, and ways to receive new information influenced teachers' overall beliefs in EFL listening instruction. In addition, age, educational background, major, years of teaching, students they taught, self-training time of listening, and ways to receive information had an effect on teachers' overall teaching techniques. Another researcher, Chang (1998) surveyed 661 junior high school teachers to explore their pedagogical content knowledge. In the study, gender and years of teaching experiences made significant differences to the teachers' beliefs. Still another researcher, Lai, S. J. (2004), probing high school English teachers' beliefs on grammar instruction, found that seniority, education background, and level of school the teachers teach at made a difference in forming their beliefs.

Through the literature reviewed, gender, age, years of teaching, educational background and in-service teacher training experiences were dealt with in discussing teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction. What is more, teachers' knowledge about the composition guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and whether they taught based on them were cross-examined to see if the guidelines played a role in teachers' beliefs and practices.

2.4 Research on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices

There has been a shift in research perspective from examining actions to

examining the perceptions on which those actions are based (Freeman, 1996). The origin of the shift can be traced back to Philip Jackson's (1968) attempt in *Life in Classrooms* to describe and understand the mental constructs and processes that underlay teacher behavior. Recently, research on beliefs has become a trend. Calderhead (1996) explained the reasons for the shift of research focus. First, there is growing dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of behaviorist studies because attempts to study classroom activities and learning outcomes have come to contradictory conclusions. The second factor is cognitive psychology. The roles of both teachers' and students' beliefs are acknowledged in a process of interpreting and making sense of classroom life. The third factor is the increasing recognition of the major roles of teachers in educational processes. In other words, teachers' thinking and decision-making contribute a lot to classroom practices. Through the study of teachers' thought processes, or beliefs, we may increase our understanding of how and why the process of teaching looks and works as it does (Clark & Peterson, 1986).

In the last decade, research on second language teachers' beliefs flourished (Breen et al., 2001), as can be seen from the rich bank of studies (Almarza, 1996; Borg, 1998; Breen et al., 2001; Burns, 1996; Freeman, 1996; Gatbonton, 1999; Golombek, 1998; Johnson, 1994). Burns (1996) observed and interviewed six experienced ESL teachers and explored how their actions were affected by their thinking and beliefs. Borg (1998) collected data through interviews and observations of an experienced EFL teacher and tried to comprehend how his personal pedagogical system influenced the ways he taught grammar. Johnson (1994) made use of interviews, observations, stimulated recall procedure, and journals to examine pre-service teachers' beliefs about second language learning and teaching and how the beliefs shaped their instructional practices during the practicum. The eight studies

focused on different aspects of teachers' beliefs, including the content of beliefs, the relationship between beliefs and teaching practices, and the changes of beliefs. However, none of the above focused on writing instruction.

2.5 Research on Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Writing Instruction

Some studies have probed writing teachers' beliefs and practices abroad (Lockhart, 1996; Ross & Dereshiwsky, 1993; Shi & Cumming, 1995). Ross and Dereshiwsky's (1993) study was under an English-as-the-first-language environment. They identified seven full time English instructors' beliefs about writing instruction at Central Arizona College-Signal Peak Campus. The data about their roles, the approaches they adopt, and their philosophy of composition were drawn by way of interviews, document analysis and surveys. As for studies in an ESL or EFL environment, Lockhart (1996) investigated teachers' beliefs about writing instruction in Hong Kong secondary schools. Questionnaires were collected from 412 teachers and analyzed to determine whether they held a form-based, a process-based, or a social-based view of writing. The results showed that teachers were flexible in their orientations. They did not follow just one approach; instead, they developed their personal belief systems, affected by the schools they worked at and the level of their students.

As for studies here in Taiwan, few were on senior high school teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction (Chang, 2004; Hsu, 2005; Kao, 2002; Kuo, 2004; Lai, Y. J., 2004). First of all, Chang (2004) investigated technological-and-vocational school English teachers' and students' perspectives on English writing instruction. He made use of interviews to examine the elements that constructed the teachers' beliefs, the techniques they utilized in teaching writing, and their students' opinions on the

instruction. Besides, Lai, Y. J. (2004) did a study on twenty-five college English writing teachers' beliefs and practices. Interviews were conducted to collect the data about the teachers' descriptions of their beliefs and practices and the reasons underlying them. Also, their evaluation of their own teaching was included. The above two studies focused on teachers and students at the tertiary level. The learning environments of college students and senior high school students are dissimilar. The latter are under pressure to write according to the requirements regulated by the College Entrance Examination Center. Therefore, teachers and students in senior high schools tend to teach and learn differently from those in college. That is why in order to understand the situation of writing instruction in senior high schools, researchers must do studies on high school teachers. Kuo (2004) did a study on high school English teachers' perceptions of how to provide writing instruction. The foci of the study were on whether teachers felt confident in teaching writing, what problems they faced, and what they thought of the pre-service teacher training programs. The relationship between beliefs and practices was not included. Kao's (2002) ethnographic case study observed and documented the current teaching of English writing in an entrance-exam-oriented high school context and proposed more feasible and effective teaching methods. The researcher made use of classroom observation, interviews, analysis of teaching material, and collection of students' work to understand the writing instruction of two senior high school teachers in Taipei. However, the result from only two teachers is far from enough to reflect senior high school English teachers. Hsu (2005) covered teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction. His research focuses were on teachers' opinions toward prior training, common teaching methods, difficulties teachers faced, and their writing instruction.

Through the above literature review, it is obvious that few studies were done to

probe Taiwan's senior high school writing instructors' beliefs and practices and no study was done to examine the level of consistency between their beliefs and practices. As reviewed before, the consistency between teachers' beliefs and practices had a lot to do with teaching effectiveness. Moreover, empirical research showed that teachers' background experiences help form teachers' beliefs and thus practices. In sum, in order to get a fuller picture of the writing instruction at the high school level, the researcher did this study.

2.6 Research Questions

Based on the literature review, the research questions are proposed.

1. What are high school English teachers' beliefs and practices in writing instruction?
2. How consistent is it between their beliefs and practices? If inconsistency exists, what might be the reasons for the inconsistency?
3. How differently do the teachers with different background experiences believe and teach?