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# Will a U.S. Earned Ph.D. Help a Teacher Educator Apply Theory to Practice in Korea?: A Case Study

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As great attention is given to a high quality of English education in Korea, more and more in-service and pre-service English teachers are looking for an opportunity to study in an English speaking country to become better qualified teachers. However, after receiving a degree in an English speaking country, many teachers fail to apply what they have learned to their own teaching due to their tensions of identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism within the changes of sociocultural settings. By using sociocultural theory as a theoretical framework, this paper explores how formal training and Ph.D. studies in the U.S. have influenced a Korean teacher educator in applying theory to practice in relation to her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism during 30 years of her teaching experience. Rather than facing tensions, the teacher educator has been willing to change her roles, broaden and deepen her beliefs in teaching and knowledge about theory of teaching and learning, and continue her professional development. Limitations and implications of the study are provided.

**[sociocultural theory/identity/beliefs/knowledge/professionalism/formal training and Ph.D. studies in the U.S. ]**

## I. INTRODUCTION

There are increasing numbers of people who wish to learn English. Economic and transportation development and people's increasing needs and desire for travel have made the world smaller and have resulted in a myriad of languages and cultures in one geographic area. Out of a need for mutual understanding, English has become a global language with great political and economical power. Accordingly, many people learn English for different purposes. Some people learn it because they are interested in it.

Others learn it to attend colleges or get jobs in the U.S. or other English speaking countries. Still others learn English to survive in those countries as immigrants.

The importance of English education in Korea has been greatly emphasized these days (Lee, 2007). The new government announced that secondary school English teachers should use English only for English classes beginning in 2010 to improve students' communicative skills. Many educators, teachers, parents, and students are confused and concerned about this abrupt change. Still, parents and students wish to learn English from highly qualified teachers. Thus, in the secondary level, a growing number of in-service and pre-service English teachers seek opportunities to study in an English speaking country to develop themselves as professionals and become better teachers. In the tertiary level, since the middle of 1980s, "with the gradual popularization and professionalization of graduate education worldwide, [a Ph.D.] has become the norm for faculty at four-year colleges and universities" (Lee, 2003, p. 180). The percentage of faculty members who hold a Ph.D. increased from 39.8% in 1983, to 73.5% in 1990, and 83.3% in 2000, and there is almost 0% of faculty members who only hold bachelor's degree (Lee, 2003). Correspondingly, most of the colleges in Korea now require at least a master's degree to apply for an English instructor's position and a Ph.D. for a full-time professor position. It is reported that the percentage of faculty who earned a Ph.D. in the U.S. increased from 56.4% in 1983 to 67.6% in 2000 whereas, the percentages of those who earned a Ph.D. in other countries decreased from 43.6% in 1983 to 32.4% in 2000 (Lee, 2003). More and more people return to Korea with a degree from the U.S. trying to enhance their professionalism as well as their status. In short, "what teachers should know, how they should learn it, and how their knowledge and competence should be assessed" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 403) are decided by social recognition and value for their specific teaching context and strongly dependant on political choices.

The question is, does a Ph.D. help people who became teachers or teacher educators successfully apply what they learned in their classrooms? Will they experience difficulties because of their changes of identities, beliefs, knowledge, and sociocultural contexts? The purpose of this study is to explore the ways that a teacher educator in Korea who received a Ph.D. in the U.S. understands the influence of her American education over the course of her career. Since this study was a case study, only one participant was chosen and only her interview data was used. Also, since there were few secondary school teachers who hold a Ph.D., a full-time faculty teacher educator with a Ph.D. in a four-year Korean university was chosen for the study. In addition, rather than simply looking at what has been changed and what kinds of tensions one is currently encountering in applying theory to practice right after returning to his or her own country with a Ph.D., I wanted to see how one has experienced changes and coped with tensions for a long period of time: before studying in the U.S., while studying in the U.S., and after coming back to Korea with a Ph.D. and 30

years of teaching. Accordingly, a senior professor was chosen rather than a novice or junior professor. Through interviews with the senior professor, this study will investigate how her experience in the United States helped or hindered her to become a better teacher educator. In addition, the study will examine whether or not she faced with any tensions in relation to her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and sociocultural settings. The following two research questions are thus addressed:

1. How will the teacher educator's formal training and a Ph.D. degree in the U.S. help or hinder her perception of progress?
2. Will the teacher educator experience tensions when applying theory to practice in relation to her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism? If so, what are those tensions, and will they be resolved or aggravated?

## II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this section is to introduce what kinds of contributions about finding teachers' tensions of identities, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism were made, and to provide rationales of this study. Only a few studies have been conducted to investigate English teachers' difficulties or tensions when applying theory to practice in classrooms in relation to teachers' identities, beliefs, knowledge, life experiences, and professional development (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Golombek, 1998; Johnston, Pawan, & Mahan-Taylor, 2005). Those studies were based on the idea that teachers' changes of identities, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism are always strongly affected by changes of sociocultural contexts. They also focused on what factors created tensions and made teachers fall into dilemmas. They further described what kinds of tensions that teachers experienced, and how they negotiated with those tensions. Except for Johnston, Pawan, and Mahan-Taylor's (2005) study, however, those studies did not give the same amount of attention to teachers' identities, beliefs, knowledge, and professional development. For example, in Duff and Uchida (1997) study, the main focus was given to teachers' identities, and their connections with other internal and external factors of the teachers. In addition, Golombek's (1998) study focused mostly on negotiations of teachers' tensions in relation to their applications of knowledge in the classrooms. Also, except for Johnston, Pawan, and Mahan-Taylor's (2005) study, the focus of other two studies was given to novice teachers with an MA degree earned in the U.S. who only had a few years of teaching experiences. What kinds of tensions and challenges those novice teachers were encountering and how they were coping with them were explored. Yet, how their identities, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism would have changed as they became more experienced was not discussed.

The studies did not consider whether teachers' diversities of teaching and learning experiences would make differences when applying theory to practice and dealing with tensions. For example, two novice native English speaking teachers and two novice non-native English-speakers teachers with fewer than two years of teaching experience were interviewed in Duff and Uchida's (1997) study. Rather than pointing out if the different teaching environments in the U.S. affected the teachers' practices, they simply focused on describing each teacher's tensions. Golombek (1998) also was not interested in how closely the tensions of the two new teaching assistants were related to their lack of teaching experiences and how their formal training in a graduate program perusing a master's degree and their status as native speakers of English played roles in developing their identities, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism.

In contrast, Johnston, Pawan, and Mahan-Taylor's (2005) study focused on all areas of identity, beliefs, professional development, knowledge, and a senior teacher's life stories. Also, how the teacher's having an MA and 20 years of teaching experience affected her was emphasized. However, the study participant was an American who earned an MA in the U.S., teaching in a foreign country, Japan. In other words, the study focused on tensions which a teacher as a foreigner was experiencing in a foreign country. In this paper, even though the study participant would be only one as in Johnston, Pawan, and Mahan-Taylor's (2005) study, the emphasis will be given to how getting formal education and earning a Ph.D. in the U.S. affected a teacher educator and how she has been negotiating with tensions for 30 years in her home country, Korea. I will also discuss her tensions caused from her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professional development.

## III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Johnson (2006) states that "the epistemological stance of the sociocultural turn supports the notion that humans develop as participants in cultural communities and that their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities-which also change" (Rogoff, 2003, pp. 3-4, cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 238). Accordingly, he considers that "both participation and context are critical to human cognition" (Johnson, 2006, p. 238). Particularly in the second language (L2) teacher education field, sociocultural theory assumes that L2 teachers can learn "the content they were expected to teach (i.e. language) and, [at the same time, they can teach] practices (i.e. how best to teach it)" (p. 238) in the contexts where their students, classrooms, schools, and other teachers are all involved. It also supports the ideas that L2 teachers constantly use and create legitimate forms of knowledge to make better decisions about how to teach students the best and develop pedagogical expertise "within socially, culturally, and

historically situated contexts" (p. 239). In sum, sociocultural theory sees teachers' changes and developments together with changes of siciocultural contexts. Since sociocultural theory explains teacher educator's teaching and learning experience the best, it was employed in this study as a theoretical framework. The attention was given to the following four areas: teacher identity, teacher beliefs, teacher knowledge, and professional development and formal training. Each area will be discussed briefly.

## 1. Teacher Identity

Teachers' social and cultural identities, perceptions, roles, and self-images change as they develop professionally and "in response to unexpected questions/problems or critical incidents that arise in each classroom context" (Bailey & Nunan, 1996; Freeman & Richards, 1996, cited in Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 473). And one's sociocultural identity can be formed in relation to gender, status, geographical settings, and age (Duff & Uchida, 1997; McKay & Hornberger, 1996). The sociocultural identities of teachers are constantly changing in unpredictable ways in connection with language, culture, and teaching interrelationships. Many teachers become frustrated when they have to negotiate their roles and identities as teachers within their classroom settings. Excessive institutional pressures and societal expectations also make teachers frustrated. Additionally, a contradiction can be formed when there is a mismatch between what schools, parents, and students want, and what teachers want. Duff and Uchida (1997) point out that the local classroom culture, the institutional culture, and the textbook or fixed curriculum can stress teachers. However, they believe that teachers need to continuously negotiate with "the curriculum, the institution's expectations of them, their own teaching/learning preferences, and their comfort level in dealing with (cross-) cultural issues and materials" (p. 469).

## 2. Teacher Beliefs

Teachers' beliefs about teaching are formed "based on past learning experiences" (Almarza, 1996; Bailey et al., 1996; Calderhead & Robson, 1991; Kagan, 1992; Powell, 1994, cited in Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 468). Teachers tend to teach students in ways that they think the most important or enjoyable for their students. And the way they teach as teachers is mostly affected by how they learned as students in the past (Shin, 2002). Freeman and Johnson (1998) opine that teachers should understand "their beliefs and knowledge about learning and teaching and be thoroughly aware of the certain impact of such knowledge and beliefs on their classrooms and the language learners in them" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 412). In other words, teachers' beliefs can be developed and changed based on previous learning, teaching, and cross-cultural experiences. And teachers

should recognize what their beliefs are and, more specifically, what would be the most important for teaching a language. In many cases, teachers experience a mismatch between what they believe about their cultural practices and identities and what actually happens in class (Duff & Uchida, 1997, p. 472). However, by having a clear understanding about their teaching beliefs and adjusting them to a particular classroom context and students' needs, teachers can take active roles, make the class interesting, and encourage students. Similar to identities, teachers' beliefs are strongly affected by their personal life experiences within different social and cultural contexts. And the beliefs are not fixed but keep changing as teachers' teaching and learning experiences are broadened and deepened throughout their lives.

## 3. Teacher Knowledge

Pre-service teachers try to learn as much as possible to become good teachers and in-service teachers also keep trying to learn more about teaching and learning to become better teachers. Especially teachers who wish to teach or who are currently teaching a second language need to have enough knowledge about the language in order to teach it. For example, they should know about theoretical linguistics such as syntax, phonology, morphology, and semantics. In addition, they should have enough understandings about how students learn a second language and how the language should be taught in a specific context that they are involved. Having enough knowledge about different kinds of teaching methods, pedagogy, literature, etc. is also important for teachers. These forms of knowledge can be referred to as conceptual knowledge which is known as theory (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Then, will having conceptual knowledge always make it possible for teachers to teach students successfully? The answer would be 'No'. Knowing how to apply conceptual knowledge appropriately to students and to a class would be also needed, and it can be referred to as perceptual knowledge which is known as practice (Freeman & Johnson, 1998). Kessels and Korthagen (1996) emphasize the importance of perceptual knowledge by saying that teachers are "not there to lecture about educational theory, to instruct general rules, or extensively discuss instructional principles [and thus] what it needs [to teachers] is the development of perceptual knowledge" (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996, p. 21). In addition, both forms of knowledge are "constructed through [teachers'] experiences in and with students, parents, and administrators as well as other members of the teaching profession" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 401). In other words, "how teachers actually use their knowledge in classrooms is highly interpretive, socially negotiated, and continually restructured within the classrooms and schools where teachers work" (p. 400).

### 4. Professional Development and Formal Training

Even though pre-service teachers gained enough knowledge through training and became real teachers, their knowledge does not remain unchanged. That is, teachers constantly learn something new and try to adopt the new knowledge to professionally develop themselves. Johnson (2006) points out that teachers' professional development is not only their right but also their responsibility (Johnson, 2006). Freeman and Johnson (1998) state that teachers' learning takes place on the bases of "the role of prior knowledge and beliefs in learning to teach, the ways in which such teaching knowledge develops over time and throughout teachers' careers, [and] the role of context in teacher learning" (Bailey et al., 1996; Berliner, 1986; Britzman, 1991; Genburg, 1992; Johnson, 1994; Lortie, 1975, cited in Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 407). Through the process of teachers' professional development, they can be engaged in "self-directed, collaborative, inquiry-based learning that is directly relevant to teachers' classroom lives" (Johnson, 2006, p. 243). "Teacher inquiry seminars, peer coaching, narrative inquiry, lesson study groups, and critical friends groups" (Bambino, 2002; Bell 2002; Burns, 1999; Clair, 1998; Dubetz, 2005; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Takemura & Shimizu, 1993, cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 243) would be examples of activities that teachers can promote their professional development. Teachers' learning as same as their teaching cannot be apart from societies, schools, classrooms, and students (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006). Also, encouragement and financial support from school administrators and educational policy makers would be essential to make teachers' learning effective (Johnson, 2006). In short, social, institutional, and cultural factors strongly affect teachers' desire for professional development.

## IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 1. Participant

The participant, Yoon, is a 58 year old teacher educator in Korea. She has taught in a private university in the English Education Department for about 30 years. She studied English language and literature when she was an undergraduate student. She taught middle school students for about one year after graduating from college. Then, she met her current husband, got married, and came to the United States for graduate study in 1973. Her major was secondary education, the minor applied linguistics. She stayed in the States for about five years and finally earned her Ph.D. She went back to Korea in 1978 and started to teach college students. She has continuously and actively participated in conferences and

workshops, working on her own research and publications, and visiting the United States as an exchange professor or a visiting scholar. There are several reasons why I decided to interview her. Rather than simply focusing on what kinds of difficulties or tensions a novice teacher experiences in applying theory to practice right after receiving an MA or Ph.D., I wanted to understand how the teacher coped with her tensions and how her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism changed as she has been becoming a senior professor and a teacher educator for 30 years. Also, I wanted to focus on a teacher educator who came back to her home country with a U.S. earned Ph.D. and has been teaching in her home country rather than teaching in a different country as a foreign teacher. Finally, I wanted to look deeply into one teacher educator rather than comparing her with other teachers with different teaching or learning backgrounds. Eventually I would like to expand this study by collecting more research data such as several interviews, classroom observations, teaching logs, etc.

## 2. Data Collection and Analysis

The interview was conducted in English via MSN video chat. Each person was at her home: the interviewer in the U.S. and the participant in Korea. The interview lasted approximately an hour. Before the interview, I explained the purpose of the study and interview, how long the interview would take, and provided questions which will be asked to Yoon. During the interview, the focus was first given to Yoon's life history: what made Yoon interested in teaching English, how she had developed and been educated before going to the U.S., while in the U.S., and after coming back to Korea, what made her study for a Ph.D. in the U.S., what kinds of difficulties she experienced in terms of her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism before going to the U.S., while staying in the U.S., and after coming back to Korea, what she tried to do to overcome the difficulties she encountered, etc. Then, I asked Yoon to reflect on her teaching and think more deeply about how she applied her theory to practice in her class and whether she experienced any changes of identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism. In addition, the focus was given to her current situation and future. I finally asked Yoon how she saw herself as a teacher educator, what kinds of tensions still remained as problems to her, how those problems were solved, and what kinds of advice she would give to other pre-service teachers studying in the U.S., etc. (The interview questions are listed in Appendix.). All conversations were audio recorded and transcribed word-by-word. To enhance reliability, I shared the transcripts with Yoon and asked her if there were any mistakes in them.

For the data analysis, the ATLAS-ti program was used. The ATLAS-ti program is a powerful and intuitive qualitative analysis tool which makes it possible to qualitatively analyze large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. Basically, a researcher can

choose any meaningful quote, give titles or add memos for the chosen quotes, create different codes that she or he wants to see from the data, and group codes (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH, 2009). Accordingly, searching for certain codes or quotes which are specifically related to research questions becomes possible.

For my data analysis, I only had the written interview transcript. I created such codes as identity, beliefs, knowledge, professional development, tension, no tension, tension resolution, etc. which were directly linked to my study interests. I first read through the transcript, chose sentences which were meaningful to me, and categorized those sentences according to different codes. Then, I tried to see if some units of sentences with certain codes could be tied together with broader and more common themes: before going to the U.S., while staying in the U.S., and after returning to Korea. Finally, I listed all chosen units of sentences with different codes and tried to connect those units of sentences with each research question. I was thus able to see all quotes according to different themes at once, and it made it easier to concentrate on tensions that the respondent revealed through the interview. Moreover, discourse based analysis was possible in that I could see the transcript not as a simple text but as an important "example of self-presentation through discursive means" (Johnston, Pawan, & Mahan-Taylor, 2005, p. 57). That is, I could objectively see how, why, and when the respondent's identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism in a language teaching and learning environment change (Johnston, 1997; Johnston, Pawan, & Mahan-Taylor, 2005), and how tensions connected with them were aggravated or resolved.

## V. FINDINGS

In this section, changes of Yoon's identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism with different sociocultural contexts will be discussed.

### 1. Adjusting Identity

Before Yoon went to the U.S., her identity as a teacher was uncertain and unsettled. She chose English language and literature as a major because her test scores in English had been the highest among other subjects throughout her secondary school years. Since she neither liked nor disliked English, she continued studying English. However, it made it difficult for her to decide what she really wanted to do after graduating from the university. When I asked her why she became a teacher in a middle school, she said:

"Frankly speaking, I didn't think about being a teacher very seriously. I don't know

how I became a teacher…I just…um…selected my major…and spend some time for taking education courses…and I got teaching certificate…and um..I found a teaching job…and that's all. I didn't think much about being a teacher."

When describing her experience as a middle school English teacher in Korea, she mentioned that there were not many difficulties. She was satisfied with her classroom settings, curriculum, and students:

"…I didn't have any difficulty because I just followed the English textbook starting from the beginning to the end...so I didn't have any difficulty. I just followed the textbook."

I, then, became anxious to know what made her continue studying in the U.S. She got married right after the graduation in Korea, and her husband wished to study in the U.S. He tried to persuade Yoon to go with him and study more, and she finally agreed. While staying in the U.S., her role had been changed from a teacher to a learner, and she strongly felt alienation as a non-native English speaker:

"…At first, I stayed in my host family house. At that time, there was a host family program before we were assigned to the school. And we stayed with the host family for one month before we started our studies. And it was very very difficult to understand because we just learned English from books, not from friends outside…and we didn't have any chance to use English."

She felt tensions between maintaining a Korean identity and adopting an American identity, and even identified herself as an outsider:

"…definitely I was a foreigner…and I couldn't be involved directly within native culture..American culture…and I was always a foreigner...and …so…I felt very lonely outside…and I felt kind of isolation…and I was always an outsider…not a mainstream, of course. And I was from the beginning, I was thinking about returning to Korea after finishing my degree...so I could not be an insider, but I was always an outsider."

One of the episodes of misunderstanding in her class shows that her lack of English proficiency made her consider herself as an outsider:

"…One of my professors taught one of my education courses…and I went to the

classroom one day...and no one was there. I just returned home and I...a week after...I went to the classroom again...and I found out that the professor said that there was no class at that time. But, I couldn't understand. So, that kind of difficulty with English was very serious at the beginning...but as I went on...and listened to TV at night to study English...and then maybe one semester after...I could understand the class lectures most of the time."

After returning to Korea, her role changed again from a learner to a teacher researcher. She described how her experience in the U.S. affected her to change her perception as a teacher:

"...I just stayed in Korea before I went to the States...Koreans have one ancestor and they are homogeneous. But, in the States, I could see different world with different people...and the people were racially different...they were mixed together...so...it was a like a culture shock at that time...but I became more open-minded sometime later..."

## 2. Reformation of Beliefs

What Yoon believed about teaching changed over time. While she was teaching middle school students in Korea, she strongly depended on the grammar translation method because she had learned English based on the grammar translation method:

"At that time...um...I think I used grammar translation method...explaining grammatical points and translating sentences into Korean to my students...things like that...and that was the main activity."

She also mentioned that there was no communication between her and students or among students. However, she did not think mutual communication in English was important at all because all tests were grammar based not communication based. Thus, no tension between what she believed and what she taught was found.

However, when I asked her if her beliefs about teaching changed while staying in the U.S., she said 'Yes.' She realized her changes in teaching beliefs while writing her dissertation:

"My thesis...was about improving pre-service English teacher education in Korea..so I looked at the courses offered in colleges of education in Korea...and I compared courses offered in Korean school of English education and American

> counterpart...and from that..I could see many differences…for example, in Korea, courses in college of education…were um…about just literature, language itself…but not how to teach students…things like that…so I thought…okay…we have to learn English itself, teaching skills…and then we have to think about the learners themselves…also teachers' personality. While I was staying in the States and preparing for my dissertation…I thought the most important qualities of teachers would be…having enough knowledge...good personality...and teaching skills."

She only thought about what she needed to do to teach students better before studying in the U.S. However, she started to think not only about herself but also about students and other teachers. She pointed out that having a good personality and trying to continuously improve English proficiency and teaching skills would be important for teachers.

In addition to her changes in teaching beliefs in the U.S., she explained how she came to think about teaching critically and teaching with more affection:

> "I think…more and more…I think about um...love...in the affective sense...as the most important quality to the teacher. Before teaching anything, we (i.e. teachers) have to become a human being…and I am...um…more and more thinking about that quality……I think every human being is very precious...so we have to respect all of them all the time…and we have to teach all of them and not miss anybody. So, I believe that my role as a teacher is making my students (i.e. pre-service teachers) be aware of those important qualities in their teaching."

She thought that giving the same amount of attention and respect to all students would be important. At the same time, since all of her students were pre-service English teachers, she wanted to help them realize the importance of respecting others. She further stated more specifically about what and how she would need to teach and why it is important for her students:

> "…as I said before, teaching English was not difficult before I studied in the U.S. All I had to do was to translate and explain grammar…but after I learned many different skills and some theories about teaching and learning, I thought okay…grammar translation was not all…it's just a part of English teaching...but what is more important is to teach students and to make them use English in the real context not just memorization and practices…they are, of course, important…but not just those things… we have to also make our students use English in the real context…and as teachers, we have to create an environment that

students can practice using English."

## 3. Reconstructing Knowledge

When I asked what she learned as an undergraduate student, she said that she learned about theory but not practice:

> "Well...I don't think I learned a lot in my college days. I took some general education courses...and I just taught students as I learned English in my high school and college days. I didn't think much about how to teach English to students."

While she was studying in the U.S., she realized that what she learned in Korea was not enough to teach students, but she told me that she had never considered that the grammar-based teaching and learning were wrong in Korea. However, she mentioned that the theory she learned in Korea helped her in some ways while studying in the U.S.:

> "Um...because my major was English (when I was an undergraduate student), I read English literature, newspapers, studied conversation with native speakers although there weren't many classes. So, they helped me understand English when I studied in the States."

In the U.S., Yoon developed herself in many ways:

> "Well...I studied in the classroom taking relevant courses...methods courses...education courses...and I practiced English outside...and um...I could develop my English itself and I could learn many teaching skills...and different kinds of teaching methods...and I think I learned those kinds of skills and knowledge...while I was in the States....

It took some time for her to become proficient enough to communicate well with native speakers of English and other foreign friends, but her study in the U.S. helped her expand her knowledge. I asked her if there was any factor that made it difficult for her to apply what she learned in the U.S. to a Korean context. First, she mentioned about how she dealt with students' low language proficiency problem and institutional and government expectations:

> "I tried to apply what I learned as much as possible...and the first thing that I decided to do was to use English in the classroom with students. And

students…you know…they didn't understand and many of them didn't like it at that time…But, things change all the time...and English at that time was just a foreign language in Korea. And English was used only in the classroom…but now it's different. English is used in all of the world and English in Korea is becoming more and more important…and um...the current government is emphasizing English more and more...and then…um...the new president…he just wanted to put more emphasis on English education in our schools…so...students in my classroom...they no more object to what I am doing...and they really like the way I teach them now. So, when the government announced…um…that more use of English in secondary schools…and even in elementary schools would be required, I thought that…"Oh, this is how I taught my students to do for a long time."

As the role of English in Korea has been changed from a foreign language to an international language, the government, institution, and students became very supportive to Yoon. She described how she used her knowledge in the class:

"Um…since I taught teaching methods courses...and also some general English courses...I tried to use English in the classroom for all of my courses...and students practiced English in the real context...and they could improve English...and I also...in my teaching techniques class, I used micro teaching...and students did their teaching demonstration. So, they improved teaching skills...English proficiency…and I think I helped them to improve themselves.

For handling a big classroom size problem, she mentioned that she divided students into two groups with 20 to 30 students and provided two sections for the same course. She had much flexibility of designing her own class, but she thought cooperation with other colleagues would be always needed:

"Of course not…we cannot [provide any course and teach students in the way we like]. But, we discussed about what would be important for our students…so we could change the courses offered...and we discussed all the time...and we added more courses for English itself...and teaching methods. So, I think we had improved a lot in many ways…..,"

"…as an individual, we cannot exercise our authority directly…and we have to always talk to each other. But, if you say so, I am in pretty good…pretty high ranking position...so I think I can exercise more power than before if I need to. For example, course offering...if I really think something is necessary, then I can make

others follow and understand me..."

Yoon was able to reconstruct and apply her knowledge gained through her formal training to her class successfully with much supports of the government, institution, colleagues, and students.

## 4. Professional Development and Gains from It

Yoon's successful applications of knowledge greatly encouraged her to develop herself constantly as a professional:

> "...I always read recent articles from academic journals...and even...long time ago...I ordered those professional...academic journals in the library and...so I always tried to update myself...learning what's happening in this world as far as English teaching is concerned and also I joined the professional associations relating to English teaching in Korea...and I wrote many articles...and I gave presentations...so I could improve myself.

In addition to her expanding her knowledge through engaging in reading and writing journals and presenting at conferences, she had many opportunities to visit the U.S. as a participant at conferences and a visiting scholar or an exchange professor. She could keep working on herself due to her strong motivation to learn more and financial supports from the institution. And it brought her more power, expertise, social status, and confidence.

When I asked Yoon how she would define the term, 'professional,' she talked about what professionals in her field need to do:

> "....um...we have to be committed...we have to respect ourselves...and we have to be proud of ourselves in what we are doing...and we have to improve ourselves in the same field. So, professionals...they should serve in their own choice...of work...and try to know more about their work and love of their work and students...things like that.

Then, she expressed her happiness of teaching as a professional in her position:

> "I think I feel great satisfaction when I work all the time. Even when I feel very tired, I see my students...and I become very excited. So, I think I really like teaching...and I want to teach...maybe even after I retire...I don't know. I would like to continue working..."

## VI. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the findings, this section will deeply look into how her formal training and a Ph.D. degree in the U.S. have affected Yoon in her identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism when applying theory to practice as were addressed in the two research questions in the introduction.

### 1. Adjusting Identity

As a middle school teacher in Korea, Yoon did not seem to struggle with her identity because she had been only exposed to grammar translation-based training. She had never questioned her teaching methods, textbooks, and the school curriculum. However, while she was studying in the U.S., she experienced frustrations because first, her role changed from a teacher to a leaner. Second, she was perceived as a non-native English speaker and a foreigner in the U.S. whether she liked it or not. As Duff and Uchida (1997) mention, teachers' sociocultural identifications develop along with their past learning and teaching experiences and cross-cultural experiences. Yoon's new environment in the U.S. made her perceive herself as an outsider, and thus she felt a huge gap between Korean and American cultures. She knew that it would be impossible to overcome all language and cultural difficulties during her five years in the U.S. At the same time, she did not want to be completely acculturated to American culture. She thus tried to minimize the gap by keeping her Korean identity on one hand and adapt herself to the new culture as much as she needed on the other hand. In this way she managed her identity tensions of native speaker and non-native speaker, and finally became comfortable with Americans and other foreign people.

When Yoon returned to Korea, she did not go back to the secondary school where she had taught before, but she decided to teach in a university. It is possible that she wanted to practice her theory with more advanced students in a more flexible environment since she had gained much expertise and power in her field by earning a Ph.D. Thus, Yoon's role in Korea changed from a teacher who accepts policy to a teacher researcher who establishes policy. She was also successful in combining her acquired identity as a Korean with her learned identity as a visitor, learner, and non-native speaker in the U.S. rather than confronting other kinds of conflicts of adjusting herself into the Korean context again. She thought that she could provide more opportunities for her students to be exposed to American culture and English speaking environment through her class. She thus could bring "an internalized role identity through which [she] makes sense of [her teaching]

environment" (Powell, 1994, p. 362). Her teaching environment also made it possible for her to develop her identity without having much tension. The school where she taught was one of the highest ranking private universities in Korea. And her students were studying English Education as a major and wishing to become English teachers, and thus they were willing to practice using English more in the class. In addition, the school encouraged professors to help students prepare for actual classroom teaching in the future. All these factors enabled Yoon to adjust and reconstruct her identity appropriately to the classroom.

## 2. Reformation of Beliefs

Yoon did not experience tension in her application of theory to practice as a beginning teacher before studying in the U.S. or as a teacher researcher after returning to Korea, but the reasons in each case was different. As a beginning teacher, Yoon believed that translating each sentence in the textbooks, asking students to remember as much new vocabulary as possible and explaining grammar rules were necessary. Also, it was what her students wanted. Accordingly, Yoon taught students in the way she believed was right. Her experiences in learning theory and practice and developing cultural awareness, however, changed her beliefs in teaching and learning. She realized that teaching was more complicated than what she had believed. She began to think more deeply about a good teacher's characteristics, quality, and responsibility with sociocultural factors. Thus, her beliefs in teaching were not only centered on herself but also on her relationships with students and colleagues. When she returned to Korea, respecting all students in her class and helping them to upgrade their qualities as teachers were her first goals of teaching. Also, she paid close attention to what her students' needs and wants were, and how professors, including herself, could be better equipped with good teaching skills. Moreover, she thought that providing more communication-based classes and letting students use more English in real contexts would be what she needed to do for her students. Fortunately, there was much institutional and student support. What Yoon believed was necessary and what the institution and students in her teaching context considered most important were in agreement, and thus no tension was observed while Yoon was applying her beliefs to practice.

## 3. Reconstructing Knowledge

When Yoon started to teach middle school students, she thought she had enough knowledge to teach students. Both Yoon and her students were totally depended on the grammar-translation method. She had never questioned the theory learned during her undergraduate years and her practice during her novice teacher years. However, while

studying in the U.S., she improved her overall English proficiency and learned more about both conceptual and perceptual knowledge. The more Yoon was engaged in learning activities and developing herself, the more she was able to realize how to make her conceptual and perceptual knowledge meaningful to herself and to others.

Before the Korean government decided to use Communicative Language Teaching at the secondary school level and the Korean Ministry of Education announced Communicative Curriculum in 1992, English teaching in middle schools was based on the audio-lingual method and in high schools on the grammar-translation method (Li, 1998). As Johnson (2006) pointed out, since teachers knowledge is "not just abstracted from theory, codified in textbooks, and constructed through principled ways of examining phenomena, but emerged out of a transformative process of reorganizing [their] experiences within the communities of practice that hold power" (Johnson, 2006, pp. 240-241), many gaps between CLT theory and its application to Korean context were found. With the new curriculum, CLT, students' low English proficiency and little motivation, teachers' deficiency in spoken English and training and in opportunities of retraining in CLT, large classroom size, grammar-based exam, lack of funding and support, and inadequacy of using CLT in EFL teaching context were pointed out as problems. Accordingly, English teaching in secondary schools has not changed much during the last 16 years.

However, in Yoon's case, her teaching context allowed and supported her application of CLT in class. First, she could have a small number of students and could open more than one section for the same course. Second, she had enough English proficiency and formal training and knowledge in CLT. Third, her students were ready to receive CLT training as pre-service teachers. Fourth, her school was willing to support CLT methods so that they could train better qualified pre-service teachers and consequently maintain the school reputation and ranking. Finally, she had many opportunities to discuss with other colleagues about how to make their classes better. Thus, Yoon was able to use her knowledge situationally, theoretically, personally, socially, and experientially (Golombek, 1998) without facing much conflict.

## 4. Professional Development and Gains From It

Before she left Korea, she was not much engaged in professional development. Reading English newspapers and literature and taking English conversation classes in college were her only methods of self-improvement. Through experiencing new culture and learning more about her field in the U.S., she thought teachers' continuous development would be necessary. Freeman and Johnson (1998) mention that teachers' constant "learning to teach is a long-term, complex, developmental process that operates through participation in the social practices and context associated with learning and

teaching. [In addition, they consider that teaching is] more than accumulation of research knowledge because [providing more knowledge] to teachers does not necessarily make them better practitioners" (Freeman & Johnson, 1998, p. 402). It implies that teachers need continuous development to teach students better in their own teaching context. Otherwise, they would be disconnected from their theory and actual practice of teaching in the classroom (Kim, 2008).

When Yoon returned to Korea, she found many opportunities to constantly develop herself as a professional. Teaching in a university brought her many advantages. For example, she could spend her sabbatical years in the U.S. as a visiting scholar or an exchange professor and do her own research. She also had chances to attend and present in many conferences and workshops, work on her own research, and publish books. Moreover, she became chair of the English Education Department and dean of the school of education, and now she is the dean of the Graduate School of Education. In short, great support from the school and good relationships with colleagues and students brought Yoon more expertise, power, confidence, and better social status.

## VII. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The results of this study show that Yoon's formal training and Ph.D. studies in the U.S. helped her to change her self-perception and progress as a teacher in many ways over time. First, her roles have changed in different contexts: from a teacher, learner, and non-native English speaker to a teacher researcher. Yoon's efforts and willingness to receive as much education and cultural understanding as possible caused her to play an active role in applying her theory to practice in Korea. Yoon's changes of role provided her more power and expertise in her field with great support from her school and students. Second, with the changes in Yoon's identity, her beliefs in teaching also broadened and deepened through formal training. She took into account her connection with her students, colleagues, and other sociocultural factors, and realized the importance of teaching communicative skills, cultural aspects, and good qualities of teaching to her students who were pre-service teachers. Since what she believed was important matched what her students, school, and society believed, her application of theory to practice went well. Third, accumulating knowledge about theory of teaching and learning and practice in an actual classroom through her formal education in the U.S. provided more opportunities for Yoon to bring all of her knowledge into the Korean context. Fewer concerns about her students' and her English proficiency, classroom size, students' motivation to accept CLT training, cooperation with other professors, and institutional supports made it possible for Yoon to apply her knowledge to her students without creating tensions. Finally, Yoon's successful

application of her theory to practice stimulated her continuously develop herself in her field, and her school was very encouraging and positive about supporting all professors' professional development. As a result, Yoon's active involvement in her professional development brought her more expertise, prestige, power, and confidence and encouragement.

In sum, getting formal training and receiving a Ph.D. in the U.S. made Yoon choose a more prestigious position as a professor in a private university in Korea. Also, it stimulated her professional development over 30 years. Sustaining a high status in the school and society, having the flexibility of providing and designing courses, having students with advanced English proficiency levels and high motivation, and having many opportunities to professionally develop herself helped her to apply the theory she learned in the U.S. to her Korean teaching contexts successfully and gain more power. Thus, no tension in relation to Yoon's identity, beliefs, knowledge, and professionalism was found in the interview. At the end of the interview, I asked Yoon what her tension would be now, since she did not experience much tension for much of her teaching experience:

> "....You know...human beings by nature...they are not satisfied with their present...right? They have to continue to work to improve themselves...and um...for me, I am becoming old...and I am not strong physically and mentally as I was in my younger days. So, I think that is my tension. I want to do this much, but I cannot do that. My memory weakens...and my body weakens...so all those things seem to be tensions to me."

Controlling and dealing with her physical and mental health seemed to be Yoon's difficulty now. However, she expressed her happiness about teaching and learning, and she showed a strong desire to continue her career as long as she could.

I found several limitations of my study. First, there was no peer check for the interview transcript. Since it was a short transcript and was already proof-read by Yoon, I did not ask another person for the checking. Second, due to the long distance audio recording, the interview was often disturbed by noises. Thus, either I or Yoon had to repeat each other's questions and answers several times during the interview. Using better recording equipment would have made the interview flow better. Third, the only data I had was the interview transcript. I thus did not have a chance to observe what was actually happening in Yoon's classroom and how she was applying her theory to practice. Having more sources of data such as gathering Yoon's journals, interviewing her more than once during a semester, and observing her class would have allowed me to do more in-depth research. Finally, including more than one participant would have made it possible for me to see the uniqueness of Yoon's teaching and learning stories. She could get more prestige by

choosing a different position after earning a Ph.D. in the U.S., a private university professor, rather than returning to the same position she was before, a middle school teacher. There may have been more tensions if she went back to the middle school after her study in the U.S. Interviewing another person with a Ph.D. who went back to a secondary school and comparing him or her with Yoon would have given more insight to the study.

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## APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. What was your major when you were an undergraduate student? Why did you want to be a teacher?

2. What made you study abroad? Before you went to the U.S., did you teach student? Were there any difficulty of teaching English subject and interacting with students? What did you study in the U.S. for how long?

3. While you were in the U.S., how were your knowledge, beliefs about teaching and learning, values, and identity (e.g. your role as a teacher in Korea and in the U.S., native vs. non-native) changed? Did your prior knowledge of teaching help you study in the U.S.? Did you find any gap between what you learned in Korea and what you were learning in the U.S.? How was your relationship with other friends and professors? Did they help you in certain ways? Was there any difficulty that you experienced as non-native teacher with different educational backgrounds from others?

4. Do you think location, different ways of thinking, different life styles, students' different expectations affect your teaching beliefs, identity, and knowledge?

5. After you came back to Korea, were there any tension among you, school policy, students (e.g. classroom size, resources, equipment, traditional teaching methods, location, context, students' levels), and other teachers (e.g. low proficiency of English)? Any instructional tension that you faced in the classroom? What strategies did you use to

manage the tension? Was it successful? How did you reconceptualize/reapply your knowledge?

6. Were there any contradiction between what you learned in the U.S. and actual practice in Korea? How your knowledge of instruction including pedagogical knowledge and educational (teaching methods), linguistic, and cultural knowledge have been changed, and how those knowledge have been applied to teaching in Korea? What have you continuously done to develop yourself professionally and expand your knowledge?

7. How do you see yourself as a teacher or teacher researcher? What do you think the most important roles that you need to do as a teacher? Do you see yourself as authoritative teacher, kind, intelligent, etc? (Before/during/after -> Changed or not?)

8. Do you see yourself as a professional and how do you understand that term?

9. What are some tension and contradictions that still remain as problems to you? How those problems can be solved? What do you think about 'English only policy' which will be starting in 2010 in high schools? Do you think that all teachers, students, and our country are ready for the change? If not, what should teachers do?

10. Looking back your experiences, how would you like to advice other pre-service teachers who are studying in the U.S. to become a better teacher in the future? What do you think some problems they will face when they go back to their countries and start to teach?

**Examples in: English**
**Applicable Languages: English**
**Applicable Levels: tertiary, teacher educators**

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