

### Editorial: 2103 non-themed issue

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In the first non-themed issue of ETPC, (Volume 9, Number 3), Terry Locke, Debra Myhill and Bob Fecho wrote:

The decision to have non-themed issues was to allow for potential journal contributors to effectively determine what is topical for them in terms of research interests and theoretical concerns. It was a way of “taking the pulse” of the L1 English teaching profession to see what turned up.

In December 2011 (Volume 10, Number 4), the Editors of the next non-themed issue wrote that the contributions “vindicated” “the ETPC Board’s decision to make non-themed issues a regular occurrence, since they are a reminder of the fruitfulness of inviting our constituency to tell us about the thinking, practice and inquiry they have been engaging in”.

When we called for papers for this current issue, (Volume 12, Number 3), we suggested that, “The non-themed issues give contributors an opportunity to share research in the issues that are most salient to them or to the educational context of the time”. In considering the contributions across these three non-themed issues, it is evident these “salient” issues concern the place of the English teacher, and the role of English as a language of instruction, as well as English as a disciplinary study, in these global times of rapid change and unsettling uncertainties about the future for education in general.

For a moment we invite you to consider that the papers in this issue contribute to an understanding of collective rather than site-specific understandings of the English teacher. “Taking the pulse” of this teacher, finding out what makes her “tick” through reading across these manuscripts, it is clear, we think, that first, the teacher is global, second, the teacher is a teacher of English, and third, that the teacher is concerned with helping her students understand how English lives, and how the study of the language, literature, and literacy practices of English can contribute to our understanding of how our world works, regardless of the site in which the study of English occurs.

This collective view of the construction of the English teacher through reading across these papers helps us understand that the dichotomous view of L1 English teachers and Teachers of English as another Language is especially unhelpful in these global times. The first five papers in this issue are all written from sites where English is not the first language of the students concerned. The three papers that conclude this issue are from Australia, Canada and the US respectively. We have contributions that focus on the issues for teachers of English then, not only from the “inner circle” but also from both the Outer and the Expanding Circles (Kachru, 1986), and these contributions tend to suggest a collapsing of the boundaries between these concentric

circles that have for so long provided a useful explanation of the place and the role of English in global conditions.

The status of English as a dominant global language raises many issues around linguistic imperialism and cultural dominance, which are frequently ignored in the English language policies of many jurisdictions. Within this frame, there are also issues of teacher professionalism and how the hegemonic privileging of native speakers can serve to de-professionalise local, non-native speakers. Tzu's article analyses some specific contexts in Asia, where native language proficiency is preferred, even when those teachers have little or no teaching experience. This recruitment policy has the dual unintended consequence of de-professionalising highly qualified and expert non-native teachers of English, and lowering the quality of English teaching as less pedagogically expert native speakers occupy teaching posts.

A similar interest in what it means to be a global teacher of English is taken up by Glas and Cardena, who examine the cultural relevance of TESOL teaching materials, exploring the notion of learner autonomy and its relationship with intrinsic motivation. At the same time, they are interested in the power of reflection to generate alternative visions and to imagine different futures. They conclude by underlining that communicative competence is only one element of English teaching, and they signal the importance of developing an English language-teaching curriculum which promotes rich understandings of a democratic global society.

The power of reflection is also a locus of interest of Groenendijk et al, though from the perspective of a teacher reflecting on his own teaching. Drawing on research conducted in his own Dutch secondary school, and considering students' literary development, the lead author observes how the teaching of literature, although frequently espousing openness and a willingness to accept multiple responses, is often highly oriented to the teacher's interpretation. Thus literary exploration can become monologic and teacher-dominated, rather than dialogic and student-centred. The paper explores the nature of student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction, and reveals how the actual interaction patterns were less dialogic than the espoused interaction patterns. The authors conclude that there may need to be more explicit clarification of ground-rules for talk and more opportunities to read the text in order to facilitate richer, more exploratory discussion.

Whilst Groenendijk et al are concerned to foster interaction patterns which foster more critical and exploratory engagement with text, Huang's concern is with the critical analysis of language and the politics of language. Rather than positioning grammar simply as a tool to manage effective spoken and written communication, Huang argues for the grammar of choice, where learners recognise that authorial grammatical choices serve to communicate particular values and to construct particular reader-writer relationships. Reporting on a study where English language learners were introduced to Critical Language Awareness as a framework for thinking about their own writing, the paper shows how the approach broadened students' focus away from basic grammar and vocabulary to an understanding of more ideological positionings. However, the study also found that students focused more on authorial intentionality, than how readers and writers construct meaning within discourse communities.

Grammar is also the subject of Rattya's paper, though here the author is more concerned with how students develop their conceptual understanding of grammar, using the lens of conceptual change theory as an analytical framework. She explains that university teacher education students in Finland, as is the case in other countries, sometimes have problems with grammar because of the use of reduced definitions or the mixing of grammatical categories. The study reported on here used a languaging and visualisation method, whereby students represent grammatical relationships and meaning graphically, to develop stronger conceptual understanding. The paper provides an in-depth analysis of the nature of students' grammatical thinking and reasoning.

Moving now to the three papers in the issue that represent the state of English teaching within "inner-circle" countries, the contribution from Laidlaw and Wong reflects the impact of global migration patterns on teaching practices in sites that were once defined as monocultural. The participants in their study (and the authors themselves) reflect the impossibility of attempting to pin down or define the "cultural" identities of students in our English classes. In their conclusion they are that it is the right of all children to be included in curriculum decisions and to be considered when teachers develop activities and learning structures. When teachers *do* make a focused effort to change practices that might exclude or pose difficulty for some children, they benefit *all* children.

Edwards-Groves and Hardy focus on a whole-school approach to improving the quality of classroom dialogue, that centred around the professional learning of teachers. They illustrate how changing students' literacy practices requires changing the *practice architectures* – that is, the broader conditions within which teacher and student learning occur. Their paper shows that the practices of collaborative, critical reflexive dialogues on the part of teachers contributed significantly to the development of dialogic practices within literacy learning in classrooms.

Bifuh-Ambe's research study, based in Massachusetts, reminds readers that writing is a complex, recursive and difficult process that requires strategic decision-making across multiple domains. This mixed methods study examined elementary teachers' attitudes towards writing, perceptions of themselves as writing teachers, their students' attitudes towards writing and the extent to which these attitudes and perceptions improved after ten weeks of research-based professional development. While the findings indicated that a majority of participants had positive attitudes towards writing, and felt competent teaching some aspects of writing (for example, generating prompts), there were some aspects that they did not feel competent in (for example, revising and editing). Such findings were seen as suggesting that teacher participants in such professional learning situations need to have greater involvement in the planning of content and delivery of the learning.

It would appear that this latest attempt to take the pulse of the English teaching profession reveals that the boundaries between the inner, outer and expanding circles of English teaching and learning are collapsing. The de-professionalization of the English teacher in some Asian countries is reflected in the practices and policies in many States in Australia; the concerns about the teaching of literature of Groenendijk et al, are similar to those expressed in previous issues of this journal from both Canada and New Zealand; and the problems with grammar explored in Rattya's paper

on Finnish students echoes concerns about pre-service teachers' knowledge of the English language (May 2006 issue). It will be interesting to see how the collapse of the boundaries between these circles continues to impact on the practice and critique of English teaching expressed in this journal in the future.

## REFERENCES

Kachru, B. B. (1986), The power and politics of English. *World Englishes*, 5, 121-140.