Editor's Note

The Partnership Between Research and Practice

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The challenges that face language educators and researchers are as varied and diverse as the contexts in which they are located. However, as the systems through which English language education are delivered change and adapt to a globalizing world, the English language educator remains the key to helping students achieve the levels of proficiency necessary in order to succeed after leaving the classroom. Researchers are asked to provide these teachers with the tools necessary to achieve this goal.

Both English language educators and researchers face a myriad of variables that impact the teaching and learning of language from both in and outside the classroom. On a national level, throughout the Asian region and beyond, policy initiatives must take into account the needs of learners, the nation, and the society, while at the same time considering cultural, national, and local contexts. Even policies formulated with the best intentions must recognize the potential impact and conflict that language policy and foreign language education can have on the identity of individuals and a nation as a whole (Bhattacharya, Gupta, Jewitt, Newfield, Reed, & Stein, 2007; Clarke, 2007; Graves, 2008; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007; Schneer, 2007; Zappa-Hollman, 2007).

At the same time, in the classroom, teachers need to consider how to practically and effectively implement policy as well as strive to achieve personal professional development and, for non-native English speaking teachers, language proficiency. This is particularly true when English language education is implemented at increasingly lower levels in the educational system (Enever, Moon, & Raman, 2009). Such has been the case in many Asian countries (Butler, 2004; Igawa, 2007; Nunan, 2003) and a similar debate has again emerged recently in Saudi Arabia (Alabdelwahab, 2002; Al-Tamimi, 2011; De Lotbinière, 2011). Teachers at other levels of educational systems are also challenged to prepare their students to study abroad, succeed on standardized exams, secure employment, immigrate to new countries or integrate into new cultures, or become prepared for English-medium instruction, often alongside their native-speaking counterparts (Aredy, 2011; Carliner, 2000; "English proficiency: Malaysia," 2011; Fischer, 2011a, 2011b).

The role of the researcher is to support practitioners' efforts through reliably investigating the language learning process, and to encourage a research-oriented culture among teachers (Al-Mahrooqi, & Tuzlukova, 2010; Borg, 2009; Spada, 2005). Research should not occur in a vacuum, but rather result in practical recommendations that are applicable to the language learning process. Additionally, the idea that research is a mysterious and complex activity that

"others" do should be dispelled: Teachers engage students in their classroom "laboratories" each day and drawing on their own experience, can and should question and investigate the relationships occurring in their own classrooms (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Stringer, 2007). The connection between the reality of the classroom and the systematic investigation of the variables and relationships observed there is key, and should result in practical recommendations for improvement. It is this partnership between research and practice that will result in the most effective and enriching development of the experiences in our language learning classrooms.

The authors included in this issue of the *Language Education in Asia* publication address the areas highlighted above and seek to make those connections between research and classroom practice. Through their research activities and descriptions of successful methodologies, the authors share their experiences and insights into the teaching and learning process in this region. Based on research conducted in relation to classroom performance, Jeremy Jones describes the challenges non-native English speaking (NNS) students face when developing arguments in essays. Based on an individual case study at an Australian university, his findings lead to recommendations for strategies to help a student that can also be utilized to help other NNS students who are studying in English-medium contexts.

Effectively learning vocabulary is the focus of two of the papers in this issue. Siu-on Lee describes how the combination of task-based learning activities together with more traditional exercises help students at a Hong Kong-based university learn vocabulary more successfully. How various tasks affect vocabulary retention was also the focus of research reported by Zabih O. Javanbakht. Here, the results of utilizing different combinations of vocabulary learning tasks with elementary-level male Iranian students at junior high schools are presented.

As English is introduced in the formal education system in many countries in Asia, often at younger ages and at lower levels, this adds yet another language to the linguistically diverse repertoire of speakers in this region. In countries where there are often multiple "native" or indigenous languages, increasingly, with the addition of English language instruction, the use of a number of languages during the language learning process can be observed. Unlike the traditionally negative view of the use of other languages or lexical items in English language classes, Roger Barnard and his co-researchers suggest that there is in fact a place for such plurilingualism in an English language learning environment. Beliefs are also the basis of John Macalister's paper on the comparison of how language learning is viewed and practices among teachers from different national backgrounds. Recommendations for teachers and trainers based on his findings are also suggested.

Classroom practice is the focus of the next set of papers. Nguyen Nha Tran discusses how a negotiated syllabus has been successfully used at a university in Vietnam. A number of positive outcomes are presented and recommendations for potential further implementation are suggested. At the primary level, Steven Graham describes how he has successfully used comic dialogues as a component of curricular requirements and as a tool for recycling content in Thailand.

The development of critical thinking skills has been a focus of research on teaching practice in recent years. Based on her work with university students in Qatar, Krystyna U. Golkowska recommends the use of a cognitive literary study approach to support students as they gain a better understanding of cultural differences. Online video applications can also add to students' exposure and understanding of culture, World Englishes, and authentic

communication; Jon Watkins and Michael Wilkins describe how using YouTube can stimulate student autonomy and be a useful tool to study multiple language skills. Again at the tertiary level, Debra Jones describes a methodology to more effectively utilize the feedback provided on final drafts of academic essays through student-teacher dialogues. Neil T. Millington also discusses how using songs in the EFL classroom can be used to highlight cultural aspects of the language. He reviews the literature and suggests ways in which music can be an integral part of the language-learning curriculum.

Lastly, Mary Shepard Wong focuses on the professional development of language educators. Viewed as an ongoing process, professional development plans for teachers are emphasized. Furthermore, the author presents a clear and practical step-by-step process that can guide individualized professional development and can be easily adapted to any teaching context.

In a significant way, all those practitioners and researchers who have shared their experiences and research findings at the CamTESOL Conferences have contributed to this partnership between practice and research. It is through these face-to-face opportunities that we can all learn from each other. Additionally by extension through this publication, and very importantly, the members of the Advisory and Editorial Boards of this volume have offered their support and expertise to not only those authors represented in this volume, but in many other ways to the conference series participants as a whole. I would also like to note the significant contributions to the current volume of *Language Education in Asia* by the publication's Assistant Editors, Ms Deborah Harrop and Mr Chea Kagnarith, and most importantly, the Assistant Editor-in-Chief, Ms Kelly Kimura, without whose dedication and effort this publication would not be possible.

The challenges that language educators and researchers will continue to face in the Asia region will only become more complex as policies are drafted, implemented, evaluated, and revised, and as English proficiency is increasingly emphasized even as many seek to preserve local languages and traditions. While historical influences must be addressed through this process, policymakers, language educators, and researchers must also look to the future as globalization becomes more influential. It is through the partnership between research and practice and the sharing of knowledge and experiences that all involved in the language learning process can support ourselves as language educators and researchers, but most importantly, support and provide the most effective learning experiences for our students as they work to achieve their educational, academic, and professional goals related to English language proficiency. The authors included here hope that their contributions to this volume will further support those efforts of EFL educators, researchers, and students alike.

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