Editors' Note

Communities of Practice: Fostering ELT Research in a Development Context

Chan Narith Keuk
Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Kelly Kimura
Soka University, Japan

Research in English language teaching in Cambodia has emerged in the past decade. For research in ELT to flourish in a development context such as that of Cambodia, the formation and fostering of communities of practice may be essential. Following Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder's (2002) concept of communities of practice, Keuk (2015a) explored communities of practice in Cambodia at the three levels of ELT research practice: micro, meso, and macro. For a community of practice to grow, as Wenger (1998, 2006) and Wenger et al. (2002) argued, the community and its members need to achieve three fundamental characteristics: joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoires. Through examining research practice from the micro level to the meso level and then to the macro level, Keuk's (2015a) investigation revealed the development of true communities of practice in the Cambodian context and may provide useful insights to other development contexts where ELT research is still emerging.

Communities of practice at the micro level may be viewed through the engagement of individual teachers in doing research and then sharing their research at their institutions and / or at conferences. In the case of teachers at a university in Phnom Penh, Keuk (2015b) found that more than half of the teachers (58.7%) had engaged in research activities. Taking Rogers' (2003) notion of adoption of innovation into consideration, these teachers have a shared interest in doing research, seeing the benefits that undertaking research may provide to teaching. In other words, teachers have a shared domain comprising ELT research activities, research knowledge and skills, ways of undertaking research, disciplinary knowledge, and available resources, all of which become important artifacts for a community of practice to develop.

At the meso level, domestic ELT institutions play an important role as intermediaries. These institutions facilitate teacher research activities through creating physical and virtual spaces and opportunities for teachers to undertake, present, and publish research by organizing research activities and events, and providing technical support (e.g., research workshops and training) or in-house journals in addition to research grants (Keuk, 2015a, 2015b). Teachers are able to interact, discuss, exchange, and learn from each other through their research endeavours. Institutions have also supported teachers to attend international ELT conferences, in particular the annual CamTESOL Conference. Institutions not only support and supplement teachers'

existing research skills, but also the development of such skills. Though not financially supporting teachers to study overseas, institutions have encouraged teachers to pursue advanced degrees, provided them with study leaves, and guaranteed positions on return. Within this practice, individual institutions provide vital assistance to teacher research and facilitate the further growth of the community of practice at the micro level.

At the macro level, Keuk (2015a) found that communities of practice which support ELT research have been mediated by the CamTESOL Conference Series, which is organized by IDP Cambodia in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MOEYS) of Cambodia and various domestic and international institutions. Since 2009, CamTESOL has been active (Keuk, 2015a) in promoting teacher research in Cambodia (as well as in other developing countries in ASEAN). The Conference provides grants and international ELT researchers as mentors to facilitate teachers' research. This international mentorship provides teachers with opportunities to interact with experienced researchers to complete their research grant activities. Along the trajectory of participation, teachers learn ways of undertaking research and build up best practices, that is, a shared repertoire. To further promote research, in 2014, CamTESOL, in partnership with the University English Centres Australia (UECA), held a one-day Regional Research Symposium. Now named the CamTESOL-UECA Regional ELT Research Symposium, it serves as an annual forum for presenting those research grant projects as well as other research conducted by teachers from the region.

Language Education in Asia (LEiA), with its focus on ASEAN authors, joins the CamTESOL Conference in communities of practice on two levels. At the meso level, the publication shares a common goal with authors in publishing quality peer-reviewed research and teaching practice papers that will benefit the LEiA readership. The publication process requires (as some authors may attest) intensive mutual engagement and the resulting contribution to the literature is evidence of a shared repertoire. At the macro level, the goals, systems, and abilities of the journal are continually reviewed so that authors and the readership are better served. In one example, next spring, we anticipate the launch of a peer reader program to support beginning authors in the ASEAN region, particularly Cambodian authors at first, and hope that the volunteer peer readers will include Cambodian researchers.

For communities of practice in ELT research to flourish, a supportive, workable, and practical framework is necessary. The continued development of all levels of such communities of practice in Cambodia and perhaps in other development contexts requires a great deal of inter- and intra-level cooperation, goodwill, and dedication. Communities of practice within and between each level must interact and learn, be willing to share knowledge and skills, and maximize resources and partnerships to thrive. We encourage researchers in Cambodia to research and at the same time look beyond their own research and actively participate in the different levels of communities of practice.

In Volume 6, Issue 2, LEiA publishes three research papers and one teaching practice paper. The first paper is a CamTESOL Regional ELT Research Grant Paper from Vietnam. Bui and Truong investigate English teachers' perceptions of creating and integrating theme-based content and language integrated learning (CLIL) into primary English language lessons. Next, Tran and Moore explore university English teachers' perceptions of the use of World Englishes in their teaching contexts in Vietnam. Concluding the research section, Aftab and Salahuddin examine the effect of authentic texts in reading comprehension of Grade VI and VII students in the South Asian ESL setting of Pakistan. In the teaching practice paper, Nguyen examines how pre-intermediate level university students perceive the use of the 'PechaKucha' presentation model in a reading class in the Japanese EFL context.

In the previous Editors' Note, there was an announcement about the availability of three LEiA books online:

ASEAN Integration and the Role of English Language Teaching
http://dx.doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/ASEAN_Integ_ELTA

Research and Practice in English Language Teaching in Asia
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/RPELTA>

English Language Teaching Practice in Asia
<http://dx.doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/ELTPA>

We are very pleased to announce that a hardcopy version of the fourth LEiA book, *Language Learner Autonomy: Teachers' Beliefs and Practices in Asian Contexts*, edited by Roger Barnard and Jinrui Li, will be available at the 12th Annual CamTESOL Conference in 2016. Researchers from Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam contributed chapters. Simon Borg, whose 2012 study with Saleh Al-Busaidi was the model for the research projects, graciously wrote the foreword, and Roger Barnard and Jinrui Li contributed the introduction. Phil Benson, plenary speaker for the 2016 CamTESOL Conference, provided an overview chapter, and Lawrence Zhang contributed the epilogue. We thank Roger and Jinrui for bringing this project to LEiA and then managing it so well, and we also thank all of the authors involved in this undertaking.

Our sincere appreciation also goes to the LEiA Advisory Board for its continued support of the publication. In addition, we thank the members of the LEiA Editorial Board for their dedication, particularly in the blind review process. Special gratitude goes to the editorial team; the journal would not be able to thrive without their unseen work to further support the authors and serve the readers.

We also appreciate all of the authors who submitted papers in good faith. Congratulations to the authors of the papers included in this issue.

Finally, thank you to our readership. We hope these papers bring knowledge, spark discussion and curiosity, and spur new research.

References

- Keuk, C. N. (2015a). *Investigating communities of practice and ELT teacher research in Cambodia* (doctoral dissertation). Macquarie University, Macquarie University.
- Keuk, C. N. (2015b). Participation in teacher research at a tertiary institution in Cambodia. *Language Education in Asia*, 6(1), 31-45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5746/LEiA/15/V6/I1/A4>
- Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2006). Communities of practice: A brief introduction. Retrieved from www.ewenger.com/theory
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.