Editorial: Listening to Learners' Voices

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This 2018 issue was initially intended as unthemed, but in fact a theme does emerge from the three papers – that of language learners' voices, reminding us as educators of how much we need to listen – and the kinds of things we need to listen to more reflexively. Anna Filipi's paper points to the frequent absence of the voices of international students in investigations, giving an account of their identities through a critical examination of English language learner categorisation. Suma Sumithran then asks how EAL/D teachers speak about their adult students' language learning experiences, indicating that sometimes students' voices are <u>not</u> heard in crucial ways, resulting in a perpetuation of cultural stereotyping, even if their teachers engage with them with the best of intentions. In an Australia characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity, an examination of the hybrid and fluid identities of its peoples reveal that 'othering' based on geographical nation-state boundaries is highly problematic. Finally, Nicholas Carr and Michiko Weinmann look at written corrective feedback from a sociocultural angle to give an account of how the voices of adult English language learners in Japan reveal their experiences of processing teacher feedback through collaboration, both with peers and with the language teacher.

These three papers suggest important links between learners' voices, identity perceptions, and learner achievement, and is a timely reminder in a political climate of standardised testing and higher-stakes language testing for citizenship that we should strive to provide supportive, safe learning and teaching environments.

In *The dynamics in category building of international students as language learners in two secondary schools*, Filipi engages with Holliday's (2005) adage whereby, all too often, international students are portrayed as 'reduced others'. She argues that her research brings to view the voices of international students as

language learners, and in the process enables schools and teachers to better understand how students understand themselves and how others see them. Her paper reports on a small-scale study that explored the ways in which two Melbourne secondary students assemble notions of English language learners, and the ways these categories emerge and shift over the course of the interviews conducted. Engaging a methodology of Membership Categorisation Analysis, Filipi extends socio-cultural understandings of identity as 'dynamic and variable, transformative and conditional, and as reformed contextually and in relation to social, cultural and historical context' (Hall, 1997). This brings an intimate lens to focus on identity as it is constructed through the framing of social interaction.

The analysis of conversations between the two students and their teachers showed how both participated in category building as these participants drew on their various personal and lived experiences as a process of acceptance, contestation and negotiation. In this process of co-construction the two international students, one from China and the other from Mongolia, constructed language learner identity through categorical binaries which described international student/local student, language competence/language deficit, home country/Australia and English/English as an Additional language (EAL). It was felt that better understanding of this 'thick' analysis of identity categorisation has particular relevance for teachers and schools in that it brings to view how students envision their learning, their place as language learners and the skills and knowledges they bring to the process. In particular, by enabling the metacognitive principles that framed students' work to be made visible, both students and teachers could explore the ways in which their language learning could best take place effectively.

Sumithran's paper, *What happens in your country? Teacher constructions of adult EAL students' cultural identities* continues to explore the theme of language learner identities and their positioning in the classroom, in the context of Adult Migrant English Programs (AMEP) in Australia. Engaging a phenomenological approach (Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015), the teacher interviews conducted for this small-scale qualitative study reveal far-reaching insights into how three experienced EAL/D teachers positioned their students in regards to their cultural

identities, their students' language learning experiences and the challenges and opportunities that they saw their students experience in their learning. The three major themes identified in the data analysis – perceived challenges and opportunities for the students, teacher 'descriptions' of students' cultures of origin and how learning might be influenced, and the perceived characteristics of a good language learner – were frequently underpinned by cultural comparisons juxtaposing Australian and 'other' cultural identities. The paper highlights the complex dynamics of the teachers' awareness of such cultural stereotyping on the one hand, and a reluctance on the other to move beyond linguistic, cultural and pedagogical notions that continue to be rooted in geographically defined boundaries of the concept of the nation state.

Sumithran draws our attention to the critical role that teachers play in the globalised EAL/D classroom, 'a contact zone characterised by cultural contact, challenges and renegotiation of cultural identities'. Consequently, 'teachers are as much a part of these cultural processes that occur in the classroom as their students, which implies mutual sharing and discussion of cultural identities between the teacher and students rather than only between the students' (Singh & Doherty, 2004). The paper concludes by arguing for a deeper consideration of classroom communication as a space in which teachers can engage in a more comprehensive and critical examination of how their own sociocultural identity, including past experiences, views and attitudes to language, culture and race, affect their pedagogy.

In the third article, Written Corrective Feedback: *The need for collaboration and multidirectional interaction*, Carr and Weinmann engage with the debate around whether written corrective feedback (WCF) is helpful or harmful for learners of writing in an additional language. Practicing EAL/D and Languages teachers will doubtless acknowledge that WCF consumes much of their time; Brown (2012) points to dichotomies in language learning theory, inconsistent research methodology, and inherent challenges in designing controlled classroom research, all of which combine to lead teachers to provide WCF based mostly on intuition and experience, designing it to fit their teaching contexts in ways that they can manage. Carr and Weinmann also point out that much WCF research has focused on correct output of targeted linguistic

items, often a single task, as a measure of language development, which is not reflective of real classroom practices; furthermore, they claim this type of research does not take into account affective factors, citing recent research indicating that new directions for WCF might include promoting awareness, and motivating student engagement.

With this in mind a study of two Japanese learners of English was undertaken which took a socio-culturally informed approach; this aimed to account for language development occurring through collaboration and interaction between speakers. Specifically the study looked at how WCF might cause shifts towards self-regulation within the participants' Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Benefits were identified when learners collaborate during both the processing of WCF and construction stage of writing tasks. The authors concluded that the main benefits were on the communicative value of their texts rather than grammatical accuracy, in that collaborative feedback enabled them to express themselves more clearly, and also helped them further develop support for their ideas. The authors conclude that there is an evident need for WCF to be multi-directional and processed collaboratively, in line with Victorian Department of Education recommendations that EAL teachers design reciprocal feedback involving more than one channel of communication.

Two books are reviewed in this issue: the first is Angel Lin's *Language Across the Curriculum & CLIL in English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) Contexts*. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is a relatively new term for practices which have been around a long time; however the new paradigm has resulted in a range of interpretations in different contexts. Lin describes her work as a road map which draws on language across the curriculum and CLIL theories and literature in a way that is useful to EAL/D researchers, students and of course teachers, who need concrete pedagogical approaches. Although largely based on secondary school contexts in Hong Kong, it is useful to the field in general as it both establishes a solid theoretical foundation and responds to the everyday challenges and needs expressed by EAL/D teachers.

Livingstone and Sefton-Green's work *The Class: Living and*

Learning in the Digital Age, is not EAL/TESOL specific but connects with young learners of first or additional languages in intriguing ways through its investigation of investment in learning in new times. Its focus is a class of 'tricky age' early teens at a London secondary school and their preoccupation (as 'produsers' or mostly consumers) with digital media. Their responses are contextualised within the complexities of late modernity, and linked to larger issues of social and cultural capital. The reader is led to reflect on how educators can appreciate an expanded vision of young learners' places in the world, a vision unacknowledged by standardised tests. It offers insights into how their digital and learning networks enable or disempower them, suggesting that experiences of disconnection and blocked pathways are sometimes more common than that of new opportunities and connections.

We would like to take the opportunity in this, our first online open access issue, to thank Xuan Thu Dang for his interim support in the administration role and for his invaluable assistance in getting it up and running online. We are happy to announce the appointment of a new administration assistant, Carly Minett, who will be the person behind tic@tesol.org.au. As always, we welcome your submissions, and if you are presenting at the ACTA conference in Adelaide in October 2018, we would welcome an early conversation about how you might prepare your conference paper for publication in TESOL in Context.

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