

Editorial

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It is no longer necessary or novel to point out the increasingly pervasive role that technology plays in our lives, and by extension, in education and learning. As so many of our daily encounters and experiences are mediated through technology, and specifically online communication and information, these have come to define us. So swiftly have computer-mediated experiences come to characterize many, or for some, most of our interactions, operations and discussions, it has become quite difficult to describe this reality at any given moment. In fact, many of us no longer turn to print publications for information or trends, but rather are participants in the global online reality that unfolds and is simultaneously the subject of commentary and opinion as we experience it. Print and even online academic publications struggle to keep up, and research on the subject of technology in particular is growing, but changes in online communication and information often outstrip the insights that are the subject of many research studies.

Such is the challenge for a publication such as GIST when reviewing articles dealing with technology and learning. It is necessary for editors to participate in the continuing conversation on the subject so that we might have the criteria to judge the current state of debate and research. For example, it is necessary to push inquiry beyond certain well-treated themes. For example, scholarship that solely extols the benefits of technology for teaching and learning does little to provide insights into its use. Obviously, technology is neither good nor bad; rather it is a given mediator of human relationships and activity, which like any tool, may be used in a wide variety of ways, with infinite purposes, good, bad, useful, or harmful. Another perhaps insightful, but already well-treated topic in the literature is that of digital natives vs. immigrants, often used to explain why students' lives are more mediated by technology than those of many teachers. This situation has led some or many teachers to be put in the uncomfortable position of knowing less than our students. However, the conclusions here are also clear and obvious. Learning from students is a vital part of any teaching-learning relationship. As far as learning about and using technology, teachers have a responsibility as with any tool to explore the ways in which these tools might aid us in our desire to engage our learners in relevant experiences and in-depth encounters with content.

What is needed in the scholarship on technology and language is inquiry into how phenomena such as multimodal discourse and digitally mediated interaction affect language and communication, teaching and learning. In general, educators would benefit from well-researched questions dealing with key issues that emerge from within those experiences mediated by online or digital tools and resources; both of these in an effort to understand more deeply how technological and digital tools impact teaching, learning and communication. In this spirit, GIST is quite pleased this semester to offer several such studies in the hopes that our journal may contribute to a deeper understanding of technology in our classrooms and our lives.

This issue of the journal also offers a range of other studies from Asia, Africa and America, dealing with the teaching of specific language skills, namely speaking, as well as writing and literacy. It also offers studies that provide insights into the ever-challenging issue of engaging school-aged learners of English in contemporary issues such as the environment and problems of violence in our schools and neighborhoods.

Our issue this semester leads off with a study by **Palacios** and **Chapetón** of a program in a public school in Bogotá that focused on the use of contemporary songs to raise students' awareness of issues affecting their lives and to provide a vehicle through which to engage learners with the English language. Results demonstrate that by connecting with students' realities and interests, teachers can tackle the common refrain that "students are just not interested in English" in a positive way. **Liliana Niño's** article on differentiated instruction provides insights into the *Procesos Básicos* program in Bogotá, which offers literacy and English language instruction to Internally Displaced Persons. This article also demonstrates the complexity of making instruction effective in circumstances of delayed or interrupted schooling while at the same time ensuring learners of their rights.

Mara Salmons shares important research from a bilingual immersion school in Bogotá that suggests that the use of and instruction in the first language with very young learners acts as an important support for learning the second language. GIST is particularly proud to publish this study, and solicits the bilingual community in Colombia to continue with relevant research into this topic. This study, as most research on this topic, points to the supportive role of the first language when learning a second language. These findings run counter to pervasive thinking on the topic in our context, which in many cases, has led most bilingual immersion schools to prohibit the use of the first language under the assumption that it interferes with or delays second language learning.

This issue also shares studies on processes of language learning and teaching, in both cases offering strong cases for researching learning processes from learners' rather than solely teachers' perspectives. The first in these articles is **Robert Coté's** study of the process of peer review in a writing course. The study argues for the benefits of peer assessment and demonstrates that learners are both capable of providing pertinent feedback as well as considering and following their peers' input. **Karbalaei** and **Taji** investigate the use of compensation strategies in students' speaking. Their findings are consistent with research on the topic that demonstrates that learners are active agents in their own construction of meaning, resorting to a range of communication, specifically compensation strategies when attempting interaction in a foreign language.

The active role of learners as active agents in their own language use is given voice in **Carlos Arias'** narrative case study of an individual from the island of San Andres (Colombia). The article outlines how the subject assumes an active and agentive role in constructing his linguistic identity through the conscious use of English, Spanish and Creole in daily, context-specific interaction.

It is with great satisfaction that GIST contributes to the discussion on technology and learning described earlier with the contributions of three articles dedicated to the subject. **Steve Bode Ekundayo** provides a timely, well-documented, in-depth study of conventions of *textese* and *e-mailese* in Nigerian English. His findings argue that the development of these new conventions are linguistic devices coherent with the evolution of language and communication, and do not pose a danger to the language in the form of "improper" usage. **Yuranny Marcela Romero** discusses the role of online interaction in a blended English language learning environment, and **Roux, Trejo** and **González** contribute further to this discussion in their study of students' perceptions of support in a distance education course. Both studies point to the importance of mentoring and support in the online environment. These findings urge teachers and researchers to devote attention to the ways in which said support might be more effective and sustained in order to benefit learners.

Further support for learners' active engagement with media and content is provided by **Castillo** and **Rojas'** action research study of blending content on environmental care in the English language class with school-aged children. Findings are consistent with Palacios and Chapetón's article that students can connect with language through attention to stimulating topics and linkages to events in their own lives.

This semester's issue offers one reflection article, also dealing with the integration of technology and hands-on student-centered learning experiences in biliteracy centers for Spanish and English speakers in the U.S. The centers proposed focus on the development of integrated projects focusing on language arts and other academic content areas. The projects are supported by literacy development and a wide range of digital tools. Proposals such as this form an important basis for future research as to their effectiveness.

Finally, GIST is pleased to provide a book review of a new local publication, *Teaching and Learning another Language Strategically*, by Rigoberto Castillo, also an author in this issue. **Aglaya Weidner** reviews the text and offers first-hand experience using it with learners in Germany. With this review, our final issue this year gives voice to local and international scholars and researchers, and continues to foster connections and discussion through their efforts. We hope that our readers find the journal relevant and thought provoking at the same time, and we welcome all comments and contributions.

Editor

***Josephine Taylor** received her BA in English and French from Emory University and her MS in the Teaching of English as Second Language from Georgia State University, both in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been a teacher of English language and linguistics for more than 25 years, as well as administrator, curriculum designer, and external reviewer of language education programs in the U.S. and Colombia. She has also worked extensively in English language publishing, as author, course developer and editor. Josephine is currently the Editor of *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal* and Adjunct Professor in the undergraduate and graduate bilingual teaching programs at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana, ÚNICA*.