

Editorial

Josephine Taylor*

In this issue of GiST, as in recent issues, the Editorial Committee has chosen to publish a few studies on topics of great interest to local teachers in bilingual and other schools in Bogotá. These issues may not coincide directly with the editorial focus of GiST as they do not treat bilingual or language education per se. They do, however, represent the research interests of teachers enrolled in UNICA's postgraduate program in bilingual education. These young teacher-researchers work at both public and private, elite and charity schools. Their research interests stem from their daily teaching experience, which is much like that of teachers around the world. In the past two years, GiST has published a number of these studies as a diversion from its main publication aim, but in the interest of pointing to the importance of treating local research interests and concerns.

By far, the majority of the research projects in the program deal with non-cognitive issues in the classroom: behavior, motivation, self-regulation, executive function, attention, the role of feelings, resilience, inclusion, bullying, and metacognition; the cognitive studies lean towards critical thinking and attention. Other studies examine the role of art and music programs on children's resilience. Although the program is a specialization degree in bilingual education, few students focus their final graduate project on language teaching or learning, as they are free to pursue their own chosen research topic within the field of education broadly.

Some projects do focus on the process of second language learning, and have pointed to the important role of the first language in this process, especially with preschool children who are new to the language. Indeed, the breadth of research interests and the studies carried out have also pointed to the keen desire of teachers for more grounded training and professional development in non-cognitive areas. The research demonstrates that teachers generally cope with the challenges they face, and appear to be in some cases resourceful, implementing strategies to deal with a wide range of non-cognitive issues in the classroom. They do this in spite of little or no specific training on these issues. The research also points to the need for school-wide projects and initiatives to support teachers' work and interest in the so-called "soft skills." Indeed, the literature on non-cognitive skills point to their crucial role in processes of academic achievement.

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While GIST will retain its dedication to studies and reflections on language learning and teaching as well as bilingual education, we feel that inclusion of this nascent research can shed light on current realities in schools in Bogotá, which may be considered to be indicative of schools in many other places. These studies involving teacher-driven exploratory research consistently point to the key role of teachers in learning processes, and the resourcefulness of many of them when addressing the challenges of the classroom. It also clearly points to the need for institutional support and professional development, particularly in the areas most pertinent to teachers and students' growth, mainly the behavioral, attitudinal and emotional connection with learning and school.

Aside from these local studies, GIST is privileged once again in this most recent issue of the journal to have received and accepted articles from Asia, Europe, North and South America. Teachers' research interests continue to be varied yet highly relevant to their daily work in education practice, research and policy. They offer a summation and sharing of important experiences in different contexts including teacher preparation, higher education, global English environments and second language negotiation. In this regard, GIST continues to enjoy the attention and support from its contributors and collaborators. We have gained wide and consistent interest and participation from peer reviewers, authors, and members of our Editorial and Scientific Committees. Just this month, GiST was once again evaluated as a Category B journal by *Colciencias*, Colombia's scientific research evaluation agency. For a young journal like GIST, this category is a positive qualification and speaks to the extent of GiST's international presence and focus.

Specifically, the studies this semester offer us a chance to learn from teacher-researchers in our own contexts, and we hope their work will inspire others to contribute. From Colombia, **Sergio Alonso Lopera Medina** explores the effects of classroom assessment practices in a foreign language reading course. The study points to the impact of assessment for learning practices on students' perceptions as well as learning outcomes.

6 One of the studies mentioned at the outset of this editorial comes from **David Vargas Alfonso**, who explores the types of critical thinking evident in a range of academic subjects. Data was collected from teachers, classrooms and students in English, Spanish and French classes, and point to the ways in which teachers, and sometimes students promote critical thinking practices in class, even when teachers may not.

Katherine O'Donnell Christoffersen also explores students' roles in their own writing processes, particularly the mitigation of disagreement in peer review sessions. She compares both L2 learners and native English speakers'

use of these mitigation conventions as face-saving mechanisms in order to soften their critiques of one another's work.

The continuous focus on students is woven throughout this issue, as another graduate student from UNICA's specialization program presents a case study of middle school students in Bogotá, and explores the factors affecting academic resilience in these young people. **Luisa Fernanda Rojas'** study affirms the strong connection between family and individual protective factors and resilience on academic achievement. The study also offers a view from the context of vulnerable middle school students in Bogotá.

From Turkey, **Turgay Han** examines the use of foreign language learning strategies by students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs in a Turkish university. The study points to the wide range of strategies studied, and the preferences of students in terms of the strategies they employ.

GiST offers several reflective articles this issue as well. Of particular interest in this context is the collection of multi-perspective reflections from a curriculum unification process in Ecuador for English language teaching programs across the country. The article offers an interesting view into the many agendas represented in large-scale inter-governmental initiatives around English language learning. The players in this process include **M. Elisabeth Serrano, Cristina G. Vizcaino, Daniel Cazco, and Natalie A. Kuhlman.**

From an EFL teacher education program in Switzerland, **Holli Schaubert** proposes a model for using the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) for dialogic reflection. The exploration of self-analytical and reflective tools for teachers in training is a key factor in promoting dialogic reflections of practice as an on-going tool for self-development in teaching.

Finally, **Nguyen Cao Thanh** offers a thoughtful treatment of the differences between English and Vietnamese spoken and written grammar in English. This reflection offers our readers an unusual glimpse into a lesser-known language, and specifically offers us the opportunity to contemplate the always present link between language, culture and code.

GiST hopes that readers enjoy this semester's publication, and encourage everyone to contribute with research articles, reflections, literature reviews, and book reviews in future issues.

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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*.