

### The Importance of Culture

The articles we have published in this, the sixth edition of GiST, represent our ongoing commitment to providing readers with research articles that deal with a subject that is becoming increasingly important in today's globalized community: bilingual education. Educators are constantly searching for new techniques to better reach their learners, and this edition, like those that came before, contains a number of articles that detail innovative strategies to do just that. Yet educators must sometimes also deal with another topic of interest in bilingual learning centers, that of culture. This edition of GiST includes several enlightening studies related to that topic, and we feel the discoveries made can be of use to many educators in all parts of the world.

It is no secret that English language education is in high demand around the world. Yet in many cases, there are significant challenges that have arisen regarding a learning population's heritage culture and language, as well as specific difficulties related to the individual needs of a student population. This edition contains an article that examines the struggles that a bilingual educator faces when she lives and works in two different cultures with two different languages, and does not feel that she fits completely in either. We have also included a study that details efforts by teachers to incorporate heritage culture aspects into the second language content courses, with some encouraging results. Yet another article examines the role of topics that are included in widely-available English textbooks and how they do or do not address the needs of a local population that, in many cases, will never visit the places and experience the cultures detailed in the textbooks.

Another fact that we are proud of at GiST is the inclusion in this edition of a broad range of articles from many parts of the world. Writers contributed studies from no fewer than four continents. This wide-ranging scholarship from differing cultures only serves to enrich our collective knowledge base and increases our capacity to provide the best learning environment for learners.

The learning techniques and strategies, as well as the discoveries related to culture, included in this journal may serve readers as

instruction, reinforcement or even inspiration. We at GiST hope that readers will find something within these pages that they can apply to their own efforts in education, no matter what part of the world they are in. As language educators we must always be cognizant of the fact that we are building bridges between not just differing rules of grammar and vocabulary, but between cultures, as well.

### Summary of Articles

The first article by **Sandra Patricia Mercuri** examines how language choices and cultural practices can affect the identity development of minority students in the United States. Through an analysis of interviews with a Latina educator, the article shows the effects of language ideologies on her cultural identity and literacy development. The interviews show the challenges faced by many minority educators working with second language learners of English, educators who in many cases must struggle with being torn between the English-speaking world and the Spanish-speaking world. The article also discusses the loss of and later efforts to regain their heritage language and how this experience informs them as they attempt to stress the importance of defining and strengthening the inherent cultural identity of their students.

In the second article, **Sandra I. Musanti, Sylvia Celedón-Mattichis** and **Mary E. Marshall** investigate the perceptions, practices and equity issues of K-1 teachers as they integrate contextualized problem solving into their curriculums in an effort to adapt instruction to better serve Latino students who are still in the process of learning the English language. The study took place during a professional development program in an elementary school in the southwestern region of the United States. The study shows how teachers valued the integration of this type of problem solving into their curriculum, as well as how they used language and culture in scaffolding to facilitate the instruction of complex mathematical concepts. The study also shows how teachers prioritized both the use of the native language in their teaching and equitable teaching by the promotion of a student centered approach.

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The third article, by **María Carolina Moirano**, aims to discover teachers' attitudes towards culture in the EFL classroom through a study of three different EFL textbooks. A questionnaire was given during interviews with the teachers and a content analysis using an a priori approach was carried out to determine how well these textbooks address Argentine students' cultural needs. The results of this study

show that the textbooks in question fall short of providing the local students with the cultural topics that they need, and also that teachers hardly notice the problem and do little to change the situation.

The fourth article, by **Mayra C. Daniel** and **John E. Cowan**, shows the results of an investigation into the perceptions that teachers have regarding the contributions that the use of technology has in classrooms of bilingual learners. The researchers asked teachers how teacher-made digital movies impact learning, and what factors limit the infusion of technology into classrooms. Data was collected in focus groups and surveys, and shows that teachers believe that the use of appropriate technology can provide greater access to academic language for bilingual learners.

Our fifth article was written by **Carmen A. Rodríguez Cervantes** and **Ruth Roux** and investigates the communication strategies used by two EFL teachers and their beginner level students in the language center of a Mexican public university in the northeast of the country. It also discusses the potential factors that influence those communication strategies. Data came from audio recording in the classrooms, interviews with the teachers, and observation notes taken during classes. The results of the research show that the strategy used most often was language switch, but that there was some difference in the strategies used depending on how involved the teacher was with the students. The researchers conclude that among the factors that influence the strategies used were class size, seating arrangement, and learning activity types.

The next article by **Yuli Andrea Bueno Hernández** shows the impact and results of the implementation of three cognitive strategies used to teach science in English. Data, which was collected from observations, field notes, surveys, interviews, videotapes and photographs, showed that the implementation of strategies helped the students understand not only the content and language, but also the class tasks. Her findings showed that students, through the use of cognitive strategies, achieve more autonomy and independence in their learning. She also found that, for teachers, these strategies made it easier for teachers to manage their classrooms and keep students engaged. Her recommendation is for the gradual implementation of learning strategies for all content classes.

Our seventh article, by **Leonardo Herrera Mosquera**, aims to prove the applicability and value of a Task-Based Assessment approach, which is often associated with English learning classes, to a different context: a beginning Spanish class. The research was conducted at a middle school in the United States in a beginning Spanish I class.

The author found that the implementation of this treatment showed positive results in students' performance on both semester exams. His research suggests that students can be taught a language following a communicative approach and assessed through communicative tasks and still be prepared for psychometric type tests, which should be of interest to language educators who must prepare students for standardized tests.

The next article was written by **Sasan Baleghizadeh** and **Yahya Gordani** and is the product of research conducted at Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran, Iran. The researchers investigated the effects of different types of feedback given to graduate students enrolled in an academic writing class. They provided groups of students with three types of feedback: direct feedback, student-teacher conference, and no corrective feedback. The study found significant positive effects for those students who received student-teacher conference type feedback, which suggests that improvement in writing can be at least partially attributed by the type of feedback that students receive.

The ninth article, by **Jeisson Rodriguez Bonces**, is related to the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), in particular the characteristics and considerations in a context as diverse as Colombia. He outlines the aspects of innovative education and stresses the need to innovate. A definition of CLIL through its dimensions is then provided. Finally, the article offers a broad view of CLIL in the Colombian context and its dimensions and influence in that country.

The final article in this volume comes from Spain and was written by **Mar Gutiérrez Colón-Plana**. The article is a qualitative study on different aspects of Comenius projects undertaken in Catalonia during the academic year of 2007-2008. It presents some of the strengths and weaknesses of these projects, the difficulties the coordinators have to face, and analyzes all the issues that need to be improved. Data was gathered from a series of interviews with the coordinating teachers for the projects. The study concludes that the Comenius project is very complex, adaptable to the reality of each center, and has a positive effect on students at primary, secondary and high school levels. The paper also addresses some problems in Catalan society and especially its educational institutions.

## **Editor**

**\*Devin Strieff** is a new editor of Gist – Education and Learning Research Journal. He has worked in the corporate environment, drafting and editing client correspondence at international law firms in San Francisco, California and Caracas, Venezuela. His education background is in history and political science from the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon, and visual journalism from Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, California. He currently teaches academic writing both at the undergraduate and graduate level at ÚNICA. The curriculum includes the preparation, research, writing, revising and proper citation process of composing formal academic research papers.