

Foreword

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I am delighted to present this sixth edition of English Scholarship Beyond Borders. I believe we have another varied and relevant set of papers, many of which deal with topics related to academic literacy. I have no hesitation in giving pride of place to the narrative paper by Msukise Kepe and Chris Weagle : “It Starts With a Story! Towards Extensive Reading.” This paper reports a remarkable project conducted in Bulembu Lower & Higher Primary School in the Eastern Cape (South Africa). The study convinces us that with enthusiasm and skill coupled with material support, English First Additional Language learners (EFAL) studying in the most difficult circumstances can be encouraged to read “age-appropriate, attractive, contemporary reading material”. This paper tells a fascinating story, and also reflects an interesting collaboration between two of our members who formed the type of collaborative relationship that ESBB attempts to promote.

In the second paper, Ahmet Acar follows up on his interesting contribution on project-based learning in our 2019 issue with “Social-action-based textbook design in ELT”. He develops a carefully worded argument in support of his view that “the unit of an English textbook should be organized around a unit of social action rather than a unit of theme, grammar, function, notion or even task, which are not considered as the objectives of the unit but just a means at the service of social action.” Ahmet’s meticulous argumentation in both papers provides an interesting foundation for more work in this area.

In my own paper, “Project-based Learning: Learning about PBL from Successful Freshman Writing Projects”, I follow up on an earlier paper (Nunn et. al, 2016) in which we presented a detailed rationale of the theoretical underpinnings of project-based learning. In this paper, I do not provide detailed theoretical background, as this is also available in Ahmet Acar’s two ESSB papers (Acar, 2019 and 2020 [this issue]). I simply forefront the actual outcomes using extracts from the students’ own project reports and reflections and their research process. I hold that approaches and methods cannot be usefully compared, or even meaningfully discussed in the abstract, as context-less entities. It is the method actually practised, the method-in-use, that allows us to consider the effectiveness of a so-called method.

The attempt to then translate actual practice in one context to another context is what can make publishing a paper internationally more meaningful.

On a related, translatable theme, Sivakumar Sivasubramanian explains and illustrates his own approach to giving his graduate student teachers a voice in shaping their own identity as reflective teachers. Siva has a deeply felt belief system, which often clashes with the more utilitarian thinking of educational administrators. He has always put his beliefs into practice without flinching, and his successful international career shows that being fearless and passionate about ethics and constructivist education can succeed within a variety of institutional contexts without compromise. He has earned the reputation within and beyond

ESBB of making us think deeply about our pedagogical assumptions. In “Negotiating Curriculum or Negating Curriculum: Student-teachers Crossing Borders to Shape their Voice and Identity” he provides a detailed argument and then provides data which supports his arguments. He does not over-analyse this data, as he believes in reader-response and expects us as readers to do our part. I have admired this course as an external evaluator for several years and am delighted that ESBB is the venue for sharing it with a wider audience.

Siva’s PhD student, John Foncha co-authors with one of his own students, Mapelo Tlowane, in “The multilingual Practices of the BA CEMS (Bilingual programme) graduates at the work place: Theoretical-applied perspectives”. This study resonates with Msukise Kepe and Chris Weagle’s study. (Not surprisingly perhaps, as Foncha was Msukise’s PhD supervisor We again see the strong ethical underpinning in a model that views English as an additional language, where the first language is neither neglected nor assumed to be lower in rank. The program they describe helps “foster good citizenry at the work place in terms of the ability to use both the hegemonic language (English) on the one hand and indigenous African Language on the other”. Their interview data provides an understanding of the process of experiencing multilingualism and coping with diversity. They find that coping with diversity tended to be based more on trial and error than on an attempt to apply the theoretical knowledge program. They go on to argue that programs can be, should be even, better designed and delivered to help students deal with the real-life issues of diversity at the work place.

In another bilingual study, Biljana Čubrović provides us with an interesting pure linguistic approach, reminding us of the importance of highly specialized studies to inform our applied linguistic decision-making. In “Spectral Properties of American English Monophthongs”, Biljana compares the spectral features of American English monophthongs in two groups of participants, English L1 speakers and Serbian L1 speakers, the latter being resident in the US. While all the Serbian L1 speakers are all fluent and competent users of English, Biljana identifies some differences in the realization of monophthongs in the two groups, in spite of the length of residence and language exposure to English in the Serbian L1 group. “English tense/lax vowel pairs are not fully acquired in the group of Serbian L1 speakers, which reflects the vowel configuration present in Serbian as L1”. In this detailed scientific pure linguistic study, Biljana does not draw speculative conclusions about bilingual identity, but we can perhaps extract from her results some aspects of identity that would lend support to Tlowane and Foncha’s views.