

Editorial

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Publishing an academic journal dedicated to bilingual education and language learning is certainly hard work, but it is not difficult. GiST is fortunate to receive an ample number of potential manuscripts each semester when we publish our call for papers, and these articles typically come from around the globe. It appears there are scores of dedicated teacher-researchers within Colombia and beyond interested in sharing their work with others. In addition to our growing recognition among established researchers and academics, many of GiST's authors are publishing in such a journal for the first time. As part of its editorial policy, GiST has dedicated itself to guiding and mentoring new authors through the steps of preparing and publishing research. Our international peer reviewers are indispensable in this process, often going far beyond the required actions, offering suggestions on content, literature reviewed, editing, and proofreading, all in the interest of improving the articles and contributing to the quality of the journal.

Some of these first-time authors are classroom teachers, not university professors, but we also receive a growing number of submissions from local and international university professors. Indeed, as most journals, GiST undoubtedly benefits from university policies requiring its professors to conduct and publish research continuously. Some would even say that such policies are simply fueling the existence of journals such as ours, and that the research conducted under these policies may not even reflect pertinent inquiry, rather the narrow interests of the professors and departments to comply with set standards of how much and how often research must be conducted and published.

In the case of Colombia, the national agency for the advancement of science, Colciencias, promotes research and scientific advancement in the country. It also establishes and controls the norms for how research should be conducted and published, and also requires researchers to register and maintain a national CV online in which they update their profiles with absolutely every professional and academic activity, from conferences attended and papers published, to courses taught and

degrees obtained. The registry also requires scholars to file personal data such as identification number, date of birth, and other information that makes it possible to track these individuals and their work.

Periodically, academic journals in Colombia are invited to review by Colciencias, and categorized according to its system. This system and these categories are subject to change each time the call is opened. In the case of GiST, our journal is currently in Category B, but to maintain that category, the journal must now comply with additional requirements. These requirements include the registry of all persons involved in the publication of the journal in the last five years. This includes not only authors, but also peer reviewers, and members of the Editorial and Scientific Committees, as well as the Editors, of course. Recently, these individuals were asked to submit their personal data to be uploaded into the Colciencias central system. Most of the people who have been supporting GiST accepted this request and provided the information, although others justly declined, citing concerns about privacy and identify protection. In fact, standards around the globe are significantly tighter than in Colombia in regards to sharing of personal data. One could argue that it is unrealistic and inappropriate to expect that international participants in our journal share information with us that they would never be asked to disclose in their own countries. In addition to the disclosure of personal data, in order to maintain the current category, Colciencias is requiring authors published in journals to have at least a level 5 in the H Indexing system, or an “H5,” indicating the number of articles published and the number of citations of each article, using Google Scholar as the source of this information.

Ironically, perhaps, the same system that is intended to better the quality of research may actually stifle teacher-researchers’ attempts to publish as it continuously passes even more restrictive policies. Younger journals like GiST actually thrive due to our work with first-time authors. Our mentoring of these authors is a key component of our work with scholars who have no H Index to speak of, have never conducted research or published before, and who mostly likely do not work in the university system. These authors most likely come from public and private sector schools and institutions around Colombia, especially, or in other countries in Latin America, and also from governmental and private organizations dedicated to the improvement of education.

6

By adhering to Colciencias policies and striving to maintain the B Category of the journal, in the strictest sense, GiST would need to begin rejecting submissions from these individuals, favoring those with established publication records, recognized research, and

advanced degrees. Perhaps GiST would then enjoy more recognition internationally due to its increased visibility in the established indexes, but in the opinion of this Editor, we would be remiss in our mission and that of the institution to improving education in Colombia.

Indeed, a key aspect of improving education in our country is empowering, mentoring, and publishing the voices from the field, classroom teachers in the public and private sector, and encouraging scholarship and reflection precisely among this group of individuals. In keeping with UNICA's mission, we feel that classroom teachers rather than university professors are in the unique position of framing direct, precise, and relevant inquiry in response to the daily challenges of education in our context. Indeed, it may be argued that the classroom teacher is the focal change agent in education in any context, and certainly in a country like Colombia in which inequality is the defining characteristic of the educational system, in which vast differences exist in the quality of education, where a miniscule portion of the country's students receive very high quality education, and the vast majority of students are subject to sub-standard, ill-equipped, and ineffective schools.

Reforms, innovation, and well-documented experiences in this area are direly needed. It is GiST's intention to continue promoting, mentoring, and publishing work by these teacher-researchers as one of our key contributions to scientific inquiry, but also to the improvement of education not only in Colombia, but around the world. At the same time, we will strive to comply with the new standards set forth by Colciencias, to the extent that these standards do not represent an impediment to the fulfillment of our mission.

While GiST generally publishes both research and reflective articles, most from Asia, Africa and Latin America, it may be fitting that this issue features solely research articles, mainly from Colombia. Most studies stem directly from the classroom and deal with innovation in the teaching of language skills, as well as insightful treatments of intercultural components of language teaching and learning. **Ender Velasco Tovar** shares research into the effect of systematic text analysis on the writing of EFL students. The results report the effectiveness of the proposed model of theme-rheme analysis for the teaching of factual EFL writing and on the writing performance of EFL students in terms of cohesion and coherence at the paragraph level.

In terms of speaking skills, first-time author **Nubia Patricia Carrero Pérez** reports on the effect of task-based learning and speaking tasks specifically on the oral performance of high school EFL learners

at a public school in Bogotá. Task-based learning and speaking tasks in particular are an effective strategy in school-based programs in which English classes may be as infrequent as once per week. In this case, the speaking tasks led not only to gains in oral proficiency, but in students' attitudes and motivation towards tasks particularly and English class more generally.

Rounding out the articles on language skills, **Edna Velásquez'** study focuses on the role of lexical competence in reading comprehension in students of Spanish as a Heritage Language. Surprisingly, the study indicates that a steady increase in lexical competence does not lead to an equally steady improvement in reading comprehension. These findings suggest first that vocabulary knowledge may be overestimated in its direct and unique relationship to reading comprehension. The findings also point to the likely role of other, including non-linguistic factors in the reading process.

Several studies in this issue of GiST focus on issues of culture and intercultural competence and communication. **Eliana Edith Roberto Flórez** and **Gladis Leonor Arias Rodríguez** look at the role of stereotyping in a university English program in Colombia. It is possible to observe how individuals and groups' perceptions and prejudices towards others affect the process of teaching and learning. Roberto Flórez and Arias Rodríguez found that both groups, teachers and students, developed and perpetuated stereotypes towards the other group. It can be argued that this process of "othering" deprives our interlocutors of a fair chance. In this university, students' attitudes towards learning English may have hampered the efforts of teachers to motivate learners towards the target language. By the same token, teachers' stereotyping of students according to their field of study possibly affected instructors' ability to address students as individuals and respond to their particular needs.

Amelia Chloe Caroline Newsom-Ray and **Sarah Jane Rutter** offer another study of task-based learning, this time in the context of a business university in Colombia. They explore a task-based case study approach in the business English program. The authors argue that by utilizing and combining existing knowledge and skills with vocabulary and structures presented in class to solve case study problems, students were able to increase confidence and, as a result, greater language proficiency.

One of the challenges in any classroom today, especially in high school settings, is the need to develop not only cognitive abilities and content knowledge, but also so-called "soft skills." Among those most critical for preparing learners for adult life include cultural and

intercultural competence, citizenship and ethics. **María Eulalia Guerrero Moya**, **Liliana Muñoz Ortiz** and **Ana María Niño Díaz** report on the effect of literature circles and storytelling as tools to help Colombian high school students identify differences in cultures. It was also possible to observe how exploration of differences helped students build identity and analyze their reactions in situations that challenged their own levels of tolerance. **Yi-Fen Cecilia Liu** continues the focus on intercultural competence in this issue in her study of interference of Spanish as a foreign language speakers' first language on their cultural identity and pragmatic competence. She finds that L2 speakers find it difficult to accept particularly the address forms of the target language culture, much less incorporate these into their own speech.

As in previous issues of our journal, GiST is pleased to be able to offer research on the use of technology in language learning, particularly research that delves more deeply into students and teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of particular tools. **Turgay Han** and **Semih Okatan** share their study of Turkish high school students' attitudes and experiences in EFL classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards. They find that the use of IWBs has the potential to increase learners' exposure to and motivation towards the target language. As is common with technology, challenges can be found in the degree of instructors' level of comfort with the tools, and with the school infrastructure's ability to successfully incorporate them into the school setting.

Mónica Rodríguez-Bonces and **Kris Ortiz** explore the use of the Cognitive Apprenticeship Model with a chat tool to enhance online collaborative learning. Their setting is the national vocational training center in Colombia, where the online model is widely available, but underexploited. Their findings suggest that by incorporating the steps of cognitive apprenticeship into the chat, both learner motivation and language development are positively affected.

This issue's articles focus strongly on the classroom setting, in high schools, technical and vocational, and university programs. As argued at the outset of this editorial, it is our interest to promote not exclusively, but consistently the point of view of the learner and the classroom teacher as important change agents in learning systems. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of our committees, as well as our supporters and collaborators for responding to GiST's requests for articles and peer reviews. Through the collaboration of these dedicated professionals, we can truly say that we have come to enjoy a strong sense of network and community around our journal. This support makes it possible to persevere in our mission of improving education in Colombia and around the globe.

Editor

***Josephine Taylor** earned her BA in English and French from Emory University and an MS in Teaching English as a Second Language from Georgia State University, both in Atlanta, Georgia. She has been a teacher and teacher trainer for 30 years in the US, Germany and Colombia. She has also worked extensively in publishing, consulting, curricular innovation, and educational improvement projects. She is currently Editor of *GiST Education and Learning Research Journal* as well as Professor/Consultant at the *Institución Universitaria Colombo Americana, ÚNICA*.