

Editor's Note

Educating Language Learners in Asia: towards Cultural Learning hybridity

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Among local educationists and Western-born educators teaching in Asia, there is a widely perceived belief in an Asian learning culture as one that emphasises literacy education and the limited practicality of knowledge acquisition. Often this allegedly established Asian learning culture is associated with the unquestioned authority of teachers as the purveyor of knowledge, resulting in the predominant role of rote learning, repetition and teacher-centred learning. The prevalence of this view is most evident among those who are relatively novice to language education industry, as one coming from a Western country teaching in Vietnam, for example, would generally assume more of the implementation of teacher-centred learning. But this view might indicate political naivety to the local educational context. While to some extent the traditional belief in Asian learning culture might hold true, there have been widespread contestations to the belief for its generalisation of cultures (McKay, 2002), failure in recognising differences between language classroom contexts (Kubota, 1999; Savignon & Wang, 2003) and the stereotyping of Asian students as being passive and less outspoken (Kubota, 1999; Zhang, 2012).

In LEiA Editorial Note Volume 8 Issue 1, I offered a further contestation to the view. I showed how Asian countries are currently confronted with the challenge to implement Western-imported approaches and methodologies in conjunction with the local traditions and educational norms. Although conflict with local educational values and traditions have been reported in various contexts such as China (Hu, 2005b) and Japan (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004), the methodological and pedagogical adaptations occurring within this process is evident. The process is a cultural learning shift in which teaching approaches or methodologies originating from one educational context are modified, reshaped and refined to meet the local needs in another context. Local values, educational norms, religious beliefs and social expectations are the guiding precepts to this cultural learning shift (Zein, 2017). The articles published in the

previous issue demonstrate the occurrence of cultural learning shift in the domains of pedagogy and teacher education. Various educational techniques such as Dictogloss and learning dictation are modified to tailor to the specific needs of the students and to meet the local educational demands. This practice not only reasserts Prabhu's (1990) contention that there is no best method - there is no one method that works with everybody in any teaching situation, in any context - but also brings resounding consequence in the imperative nature of methodological and pedagogical adaptations. Without adaptations, the implementation of a methodology in language education is less likely to be effective.

When taken together as a collective, these adaptations are what Spring (2008) called hybrid educational practices. According to Spring (2008), alternative forms of education have been developed around the world, enabling the local populations to adapt educational practical local needs and culture. These adaptations demonstrate how local actors borrow from multiple models, approaches or methodologies in the global flow of educational ideas. This in turn creates hybrid educational practices that combine the local and the global. But rather than creating a convergence of educational practices, what appears is a hybrid educational practice seen in the adaptation of, Dictogloss, for example, as a Western imported methodology to cater for the local needs.

The five articles published in this second issue of 2017 are also examples of hybrid educational practice – they accentuate the very notion of cultural learning shift. The articles are:

1. Teaching Writing Using Genre-based approach: A Study at a Vietnamese University (written by Thi Thu Nuy and Andrew Ross)
2. Effective Use of Peer-feedback in Developing Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students (written by Yi Yi Mon and Subhan Zein)
3. The Relationship between Leisure Reading Habits, Vocabulary and Writing of English Language Learners (ELLs) (written by Jocelyn)
4. Off-shore and Out of Reach: Student voice in pre-departure EAP pedagogies (written by Jacquie Widin)
5. English As a Key Employability Capacity: Perspectives from Vietnamese Students and Lecturers (written by Thuy Bui)

Each of the articles above provides a sample of hybrid educational practice where the implementation of a Western imported pedagogy goes through a process of local adaptation. First, Thi Thu Nuy and Andrew Ross demonstrate this through their study on teaching academic writing using genre-based approach. Their study found the inseparable relationship between the knowledge of students' first language (L1) and the target genre in the second language (L2). Their study lends further support to the widely embraced language acquisition theory that languages promote each other's development in a reciprocal manner and that an L2 learners must build upon existing skills and knowledge acquired in their L1. Although learners might be familiar with the

conventions and cultural contexts of letter writing, their unfamiliarity with the formal tone, style and language resources to do it properly in L2 suggests they need scaffolded instruction. The teacher will then need to manoeuvre pedagogical techniques that can facilitate this process through genre-based learning that is appropriate to the local context. Second, the use of peer-feedback in academic writing is central in the article written by Yi Yi Mon and Subhan Zein. Peer-feedback, another Western-imported pedagogy that does not originate from the Myanmar educational context where the study was carried out, was proven useful in the authors' study. Nonetheless, awareness of the local educational culture means that one needs to consider the issue of hierarchical linguistic authority. Learners consider themselves to be a group of hierarchy in which there are students that are thought to be more proficient than others, hence being more authoritative, albeit still less authoritative than the teacher. Teachers are expected to be cognizant of this issue, hence developing a pedagogy that spreads out the authoritative mode. This can be done by starting with less authoritative pedagogy such as several cycles of peer feedback to the more authoritative one such as the combination of indirect and full, explicit and written teacher feedback. The third article by Jocelyn is about reading habits. Their study suggests that teachers need to be aware of the changing forms of reading where social media platforms such as Edmodo and Schoology have been used by digital natives to access reading assignments. The traditional conventional reading classrooms in many language classrooms in Asia can be supplemented with virtual reading classrooms that blend face to face discussion with virtual learning through Schoology, for example. The authors argue that it not only works to the convenience of the learners but is also effective to promote lexical acquisition and writing performance. The fourth article, by Jacquie Widin and Malthus, provides another evidence for hybrid educational practice. In an educational setting such as Laos that tends to place high authority to teachers, implementing peer-learning might be seen as challenging the local norm. But this is not the case when it is the previous scholarship holders who played the role of the co-instructors, assisting Lao college staff in advising scholarship recipients attending a pre-departure training programme in their preparation for overseas studies. This provided the scholarship holders with adjusted sociocultural expectations and interactional competence in the new academic and cultural settings that extend beyond the narrowly focused-instrumental skills. Another means of hybrid educational practice is also offered in the fifth article in this issue, written by Thuy Bui. The study suggests the possible benefits that can be derived from collegial performance between university lecturers and successful employers. Lecturers can play a vital role in guiding students to develop research skills to utilise abundant online materials to enhance their English and soft skills, and they could also collaborate with employers to develop courses or workshops that can foster students' knowledge, insights and skills of the 21st century. This is by no means a common practice in the educational context, but it is a necessary educational intervention. The authors believe that such a strategy would help narrow the gap between theory and practice while preparing students with the demands of their occupation and building professional relationships with potential employers.

To sum up, the manifestation of hybrid educational practice is prevalent. Cultural learning shift is currently happening. It occurs in probably every language classroom that sees the adaptation of a Western-imported methodology or pedagogy to the local context in Asia and other contexts around the world. In the long run, this could lead to the development of a completely new cultural learning, a process that I call cultural learning hybridity. Moving beyond a cultural learning shift where approaches or methodologies coming from one educational context are adapted in another context, there are signs that we are witnessing new forms of cultural learning. These forms of cultural learning do not purely characterise the original local educational cultures; neither do they entirely reflect the cultural learning context from where the new methodologies or pedagogies are adapted. Rather, they are new forms of entity that retain the original cultural learning characters of the local context while embellishing themselves with new methodological or pedagogical attributes that they adapt from the other cultural learning context. As in the article by Mon and Zein, the traditional cultural learning that views the authoritative role of the teacher in Myanmar has now seen the emergence of a new pedagogy that embraces a mix of teacher and peer-feedback that evenly distributes linguistic authority hierarchy. Similarly, placing the previous scholarship holders as the facilitators in an EAP pre-departure training, as in Widin's article, would provide alternative to the narrative of the teacher as the only source of knowledge – this would pave the way for a new form of cultural learning. Hayhoe and Pan (2001) stated that “of greatest importance is the readiness to listen to the narrative of the other, and to learn the lessons which can be discovered in distinctive threads of human cultural thought and experience” (p. 20). Many educational contexts in Asia seem to have developed such a readiness to listen to other's narrative. The cultural learning hybridity that that appear to occur in those contexts is the fruit of such a readiness.

About the Author

Subhan Zein received his PhD from the Australian National University (ANU). He is Lecturer in TESOL at School of Education, the University of Queensland, Australia. He has trained teachers in the Indonesian and Australian contexts. He has published in *Applied Linguistics Review*, *Professional Development in Education*, *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, *English Today*, among others.

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