

Editorial

Reflections on English Language Teaching Volume 4 continues the tradition of publishing original contributions in English language teaching research and practices, with all the contributions peer reviewed by a renowned team of international reviewers. However, this volume differs slightly from the previous volumes in at least two respects. First, our contributors include not only those from Singapore, but also academics from around the region, including Hong Kong, the Philippines, Brunei, and China. We warmly welcome contributions from other parts of the world as well. Second, the themes of the papers are more varied, ranging from literacy studies to the teaching of intercultural communication.

Our first paper, entitled “Learners’ stories from China”, by **Agnes Lam**, presents four learning stories of four Chinese learners from different backgrounds. She shows that these stories, reconstructed from interviews of the four learners, help to illustrate language policy changes in China as well as their individual learning experiences. She concludes with a number of uses of learner stories in language education. She argues for the use of these stories to gain insight on students’ learning needs. Such information can be useful for teachers or teacher trainers to adjust their teaching or teacher training so as to better suit their students’ learning needs.

The background of the second paper is also set in China, but this time, more specifically in an EFL writing class. The paper’s author **Wang Chuming** describes a special approach to the teaching of writing, which he calls “the Length Approach”, to enhance not just students’ writing ability, but more importantly, their general English language competence. This approach, in essence, requires students to write increasingly long compositions within the span of a five-month semester. He shows that the Length Approach, with proper teacher input and guidance, is well accepted by his students as they feel more confident in English writing and believe that their English has improved after being taught to write compositions of increasing length for a semester. In addition to their positive attitudes to this teaching approach, the students in the study are also shown to have actually improved in their English proficiency in general (as measured by cloze tests) and their English writing in particular.

Like **Wang Chuming**’s paper, the next two papers, one by **Lim Meng Choo** and the other by **Yvonne Loong** and **Susan Lopez-Nerney**, are also concerned with the use of innovative teaching approaches, though for different types of classes. **Lim Meng Choo**’s course is Business English writing. Instead of following a standard business communication textbook in the teaching of Business English, she makes use of ‘literature with a small l’, which includes varied types of materials such as songs, movies and novels. She finds that with literature materials, her polytechnic students seem to be better able to remember what they have learned in the long term. Moreover, the literature used helps the students to enjoy the lesson, enhance their motivation to learn, and increase their enthusiasm about business letter writing, which is an activity they least liked.

Yvonne Loong and **Susan Lopez-Nerney** incorporate case-based learning in a communication skills course to facilitate students’ grasp of communication concepts, principles and theories, which may otherwise be abstract and difficult to understand.

In this approach, students are asked to read various contextualized cases, discuss case-related questions in a group, and present their groups' answers to the whole class. The two authors find that their students are very favourable to case-based learning, regarding it interesting, useful, and effective in enhancing their awareness of communication principles.

Most of our readers may be familiar with the use of peer evaluation in a writing class, but may be less so with its use in a speaking class. Our next paper by **Mildred Rojo-Laurilla** describes how she implements peer evaluation in an ESL speaking class in the Philippines. Students in the class are asked to provide not just a numerical grade but also written feedback for the speaking performance of their peers. The paper finds that students tend to over-rate and give a more positive opinion of their peers' performances. The author attributes this overmarking by her students to Filipino cultural value "*pakikisama*" or a person's attempt at maintaining good interpersonal relationships with others.

Many ESL or EFL teachers may have the experience of teaching grammar to learners of English. But what kind of grammar do we teach? How many different kinds of grammar are there? How are these grammars related to what we teach in our classrooms? These questions are the concern of our sixth paper, entitled "The grammar we teach". In this paper, **James Mannes Bourke** discusses and assesses five schools of grammar: traditional prescriptive grammar, structuralist applied grammar, modern descriptive grammar, Chomskyan generative grammar, and Hallidayan systemic functional grammar. After outlining the main features of these grammars, he concludes that modern descriptive grammar, especially the corpus-based variety, appears to have clear pedagogical advantages over the other four types of grammar and thus the greatest value for English language teachers and learners.

Our final research paper in this volume by **Pang Yuen Wah** and **June Ngoh** examines students' perceptions of the use of online discussion forums in two different courses: English for Academic Purposes and Critical Thinking and Writing. They find that students are generally very positive towards the use of discussion forums. But they also find that students would like more input from the instructor and many of them view discussion forums as extra work outside class, which may result in their reluctance to be actively involved in forum interactions.

In addition to the seven research papers, we also have one contribution for our **Voices from the Classroom** section. **Norhayati Ismail, Ho Poh Wai, and Ruanni Tupas** relate to us their experience of using peer evaluation in report writing classes. Not only do they share with us the various benefits of this activity, they also provide us with their peer evaluation form, which may be readily useable for teachers of similar courses.

The editors would like to thank all our contributors for this volume and also all our reviewers for providing their professional service to the journal.

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