

From the editors

Greetings,

We are pleased to offer our most recent guest-edited special issue. TESL-EJ Editorial Board member Greta Gorsuch, Texas Tech University, and Bill Snyder, Hanyang University, Republic of Korea, have edited a rich issue on doing research internationally. We're sure you will benefit from the variety of articles and contexts that are presented on this very important, and under-served, topic.

We hope you enjoy this special issue of TESL-EJ.

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A Word from the Guest Editors

Introduction to TESL-EJ Special Issue on Doing Language Education Research in International Contexts

Greta Gorsuch and Bill Snyder

This special issue came out of our experiences doing research, teaching, and participating in the growth of professional communities in what have been termed outer or expanding circle countries (countries in which English is not primarily used). Bill has worked in Korea, Turkey, and Armenia, while Greta has worked in Japan and Vietnam. Much significant, evocative commentary has appeared in recent years concerning the struggle of international scholars (both native- and non-native English speaking) to have their voices heard in the international research community, a community which seems dominated by scholars operating in “inner circle” countries such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, where the international language of research reporting, English, is most thoroughly used (see, for example, Canagarajah, 2003, 2005). Yet what area of research could be more inherently international than language education? We felt, and continue to feel, that research conducted in international contexts is often not widely disseminated. We wanted to design a special issue in which we would hear directly from those most affected: Scholars operating in outer and expanding circle countries.

When we began discussing the special issue, we speculated that a number of causes for the lack of dissemination of research from scholars operating in outer circle countries had not been systematically treated. Our brainstorm revealed a number of possible constraints, including:

- The kinds of literature researchers have or do not have access to.

- The ways in which research methodology and reporting are taught.
- Whether researchers have adequate mentoring in research processes or writing.
- Whether researchers have opportunities or support to network with other researchers.
- Whether research is rewarded by researchers' institutions or educational cultures.
- Limited time for research because of heavy teaching schedules.
- Limited access to assistance or other physical resources, such as computers or dependable electrical service.
- Constraints posed by different value systems or priorities, which may not be well known outside the researchers' contexts.

All of the above were confirmed directly and indirectly through our work with the contributors for the special issue. And, because of their comments on constraints directly noted in their research reports, we have added:

- Institutional research committees which control research funding and content (Turkey, Vietnam).
- Lack of personal funds for research (Vietnam).
- Valuing of quantitative research over qualitative research (Japan, Vietnam).
- Valuing of meta analysis over data-driven research (Vietnam).
- New governmental curriculum guidelines stipulating radical changes in classroom power structures (Brazil).
- Limited access to educational institutions for data collection in educational settings (Malaysia, Turkey).
- Access to informants as mediated by hierarchical and personal relationships (Turkey, United Arab Emirates).
- Diversity based on national origin and linguistic background of informants living in one physical location (United Arab Emirates).
- Lack of time, energy, and knowledge to conduct or mentor classroom research (Turkey).
- Teacher preparation to do research limited to writing literature reviews (Turkey).
- Limited willingness of teachers to participate in others' research (Slovakia)
- Balancing one's roles as teacher and researcher (India)

And although not mentioned in her report, the outbreak of war in Lebanon as the deadline for final submissions drew near and our concern not just over losing a paper, but for the safety of our author, was a reminder to us that the world outside academia can impinge on the world of the researcher in surprising ways at any time.

These constraints underscored for us the inescapability of context as it acts upon all aspects of research done by individuals operating in these contexts. It is not so much whether research can be done in international contexts, but rather how local context shapes research. With the exception of one or two, we had to work hard to get our contributors to report on their contexts and relate them directly to their research for the special issue. This suggests it is an unreflected-on or under-valued area of many researchers' lives. We suggest that anyone doing research, whether they are "inner"

or “outer” circle-based, reflect and be prepared to comment on their contexts, for regardless of where we operate, context rules us all. It is the barely glimpsed private story behind the public story.

We feel that through this special issue, many researchers working internationally will reach the wider audience their work deserves. At the same time, we wish to see significant growth in the number of research communities and regional journals in which researchers can be published. To this end, we were encouraged by the number of contributors who have good backgrounds in research on applied linguistics. This is a necessary first step for the development of viable research partnerships, which can find their life in electronic forums, crossing borders and even communities. Some contributors attended “inner circle” institutions located in “outer circle” countries, such as Temple University Japan, an American institution in Japan. Some contributors have attended or are attending inner circle institutions in inner circle countries such as New Zealand (Victoria University) or the United Kingdom (University of Reading, Lancaster University, University of Nottingham), and are usefully turning to their home or adopted contexts in “outer circle” countries to solve problems or answer questions of interest to them. Still others have attended outer circle institutions in their outer circle home contexts. Needless to say research is going to be done in institutions and communities across the globe as long as teacher professionalism is equated with reading the research literature or doing research in all its epistemological and philosophical and practical permutations. And that is as it should be.