INTRODUCTION TO L1 SPECIAL ISSUE
THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF READING AND WRITING IN A MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

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The learning and teaching of one's own native language can be very challenging, and it can be very stressful indeed if the simultaneous learning and teaching of a foreign language is involved. As well as the learner encountering unfamiliar words and grammar, the culture of the native speakers of the new language may differ enormously from that of the learners. It can be especially challenging and confusing to the learners if the new language they confront is used as the medium of instruction across the curriculum in the school they attend. Such is the case with some learners of Afrikaans and Finnish presented by Le Cordeur (see present special issue). In response to the numerous problems arising, many educational researchers have invested a great deal of effort into exploring ways of making the learning and teaching of the unfamiliar L2 easier. In this connection, the present special issue includes articles that report and discuss some of the strategies that teachers of the reading, writing and comprehension of the new language have used in multilingual and multicultural contexts faced by learners in many schools around the globe.

Research articles and journals addressing the problems of writing and speaking have articulated a range of effective pedagogies to improve learning and teaching. These research studies also include effective approaches to ease the tasks of teachers and learners; the success of using pedagogy that suits learners at different age levels and in different subjects on the curriculum; recommendations to policy making and the syllabi of subjects on the timetable; and the ways information technology may ease the task for both teachers and learners.

Knowledge is created through cooperative teaching, learning and sharing. In the article "Teaching heritage German and Russian through authentic material in

Jyvaskyla, Finland—a multiple case study design", Bärlund and Kauppinen present an online Active Library (ActLib) to create, test and collect multicultural and multilingual materials for language, literacy and cultural teaching. It serves the purpose of fulfilling the contents of the new Finnish core curriculum. The article presents thoughts about a case study focusing on the use of authentic material in learning German and Russian as heritage languages that have been found to be effective in improving pupils' language awareness and grasp of language learning strategies.

Foreign language teaching and learning are types and forms of intercultural communication that involve teachers and learners of foreign languages coping with cultural and social differences which originate from societal differences between native speaking inhabitants in parts of society in some lands, countries and territories. Such intercultural phenomena are often important for reading instruction and the contents of reading material pupils use in subjects on the school curriculum. In the paper "The role of L2 reading instruction in intercultural pedagogy in an Iranian multicultural EFL context", Fatollahi investigates intercultural communication via L2 reading in the Iranian context. He used a mixed-method approach to explore and compare the attitudes of Iranian university English instructors and learners towards the leading policies offered by Iranian officials in The Ministry of Higher Education toward intercultural communication as reflected in the contents of L2 reading textbooks. Gaps between the attitudes of academicians and policy-makers about the intercultural communication featured in English reading textbooks have been found. Here, interpersonal communication and purposeful oral communication and interaction can be very important for effective communication. Thus, in the article "Validation of the oral interaction strategy scale for speakers of Chinese as a first language in elementary schools", Zhu and colleagues develop and validate the Oral Interaction Strategy Scale (OISS) to measure oral communication and interaction strategies used by pupils in L1 Chinese classrooms in Confucian regions such as Hong Kong. Using factor analysis statistical methods, they identified seven categories of interaction strategies in Chinese communication. The validated scale provided a tool with which to compare interaction strategies use in different language contexts. In addition to oral communication, writing can sometimes be frustrating to novice learners, particularly with writing systems that are non-alphabetic, for instance, Chinese characters (Hanzi). Researchers explored the effectiveness of innovative methods used to enhance students' learning how to communicate in writing. For example, in the article "The graphabet and bujian approach to acquiring Hanzi (Chinese character) writing skills", Huang reports the invention of a new approach to help learners to write Chinese characters by combining the use of graphabets and bujian (components). However, writing is not limited to learning how to write words: rather, it is a medium for expressing ideas and thoughts through words and to remotely communicate with readers: present or beyond the reading context. Kiernan and colleagues, in their article "Translingual approaches to reading and writing: Centering students' languages and cultures within reflective practices of translation", used a translingual approach to help a group of English language

learners in a university in the U.S. to consider language and culture in their reading and writing practices. More specifically, the translation assignment designed in their study asked the students to individually and collectively translate cultural texts from home languages into English. This process is aimed to enhance students' awareness of the audience, cultures, and languages during the translingual process and meaning construction process.

However, writing in an L2 is often very stressful for learners for a number of reasons. Thus, Chu and Chow, the authors of the article "Using video dubbing activities in primary Chinese classrooms for creative writing", report how video dubbing activities may be used to motivate and engage immigrant students in narrative writing. It was shown that students were highly motivated and engaged in the learning processes featured in the lessons, and in the contents of the messages and communications utilized.

There is no doubt that learning a L2 equips learners with means for adapting to and accommodating phenomena in remote and foreign places for the purposes of doing business or for learning. Yet, it also leads one to reflect on whether using an L2, such as English, as the medium of instruction in university involving students from numerous language education backgrounds may hamper the learning of some students. For example, in the case of Stellenbosch, English was used as the major medium of instruction in South African universities where most of the students did not speak English as their first (L1) language. This was found to have hampered the students' academic ability to learn. Thus Le Cordeur, the author of the article "The future prospects of Afrikaans as a university language in a multilingual setting: The case of Stellenbosch" investigated whether there are any benefits from using Afrikaans, one of the most common mother-tongue languages in South Africa, as the university formal language. He makes recommendations about the university education policy and whether there are advantages from using a second language as the predominant medium of spoken and written communication. In fact, learning and teaching in a setting with a diversified language and cultural context is demanding, and a few students may benefit from this whilst many others may suffer. Empirical studies have shown that the communication problem may be eased by using different ways and common languages for communication. The matter can also be greatly facilitated by using advanced innovation technology and a range of hand-held, electronic devices.