EDITORIAL

"CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES:

A Window into Diverse Issues and Contexts in L1 Education"

MARY KOOY

University of Toronto

This issue of *L1 – Educational Studies in Language and Literature* is the largest single issue we have produced since our introduction in 2000. Containing seven articles, it covers a range of L1 issues: reform movements, the role of literature, culture and multiculturalism in L1, literacy, technology, reading comprehension and the role of oral and written language in L1 Teacher Education. Authors represent a similar diverse national scope: New Zealand, North Cyprus, France, USA, Hong Kong and Israel. The issue reflects the sentiments expressed in our IAIMTE Conference 2007 theme in Exeter, UK: "Crossing Cultural Boundaries." It represents both the diversity in the field and the simultaneous opportunity to speak to a wide range of critical L1 issues between the covers of a single copy of the journal.

In creating an order of presentation, we chose to begin with Terry Locke's *Constructing English in New Zealand: A report on a decade of reform* since it represents the broader more global issues that both concern and drive much of L1 education in many national contexts. The article sets the stage for heightening awareness

Correspondence concerning this article should be directed to Mary Kooy, University of Toronto, Canada, mkooy@oise.utoronto.ca

of what L1 education has become in New Zealand as the consequence of their "reform" of L1 Education. Teaching has become an order-taking, technicised profession more tuned to "managing" and "accountability" than professional decision-making about active learning and effective teaching. The downward spiral has left teachers dispirited with many leaving the profession. Hence, the article describes what has become a familiar and recurrent theme whose echoes reach and represent the case in many national contexts. While not all national contexts find themselves in such a devolving situation, and indeed, have the In necessary support from national and local educational federations to be professionals in the field, the article teaches a wariness and knowledge for interventions in the events that political tides and policies that may one day run counter to what we know about best practice and sound theories and in a sense, equip us for such possibilities.

Two articles deal with the connections between literature and culture. *Turkish Cypriot literature course in emerging cultural and education policies* by Ahmet Pehlivan explores the relationship between the literature children study in school and its link to creating their cultural and national identity. As a result of joining the European Union and related attempts to create a united Cyprus, new educational policies include courses on "Turkish Cypriot Literature" in the schools. The study found that virtually all students and teachers accept this new entry into the curriculum and express their understanding of its value in contributing to a meaningful national identity. This places literature in a critical space in a culture seeking to create a united front, a shared body of texts that include and represent all Turkish citizens. In an ironic twist, this study also found that effective pedagogy, "best practice," remains an elusive reality indicating the complexity and problematics of making the transition from ideology and theory, to practice.

The second article, *Multicultural context and comprehension of youth literary texts* by Marin, Legros and Prodeau also approach the issue of language, culture and identity. The inquiry into making the transition from exclusively monolingual (French) literacy standards to one that includes one particular group bilingual children (French and Kabyle) in schools in France who traditionally face challenges in learning standardized French. To account for becoming inclusive in increasingly diverse populations, the authors suggest shifting from the established literacy standard of "belles letters" to a more comprehensive, multicultural model that builds on tacit language competencies.

The next pair of articles also address L1 and L2 language acquisition and development. The first focuses on reading competencies by comparing the relationship between test scores and pedagogical practices in both Chinese and English; the second uses the genre of Greek myths as a mediating tool between oracy and literacy in French schools. The Tse et al, study reported in *Pedagogical correlates of reading comprehension in English and Chinese* examines the potential of identifying specific pedagogical strategies that affect reading comprehension test scores in both Chinese and English. The quantitative study, using a significantly large student elementary school population (4, 329 boys and girls) and teacher groups (127 teachers of Chinese; 129 teachers of English) as well as a large number of instructional practices (42), found no correlation between specific strategies and test results except where the strategies involved the use of resource materials and assessment. As the authors

suggest, the findings indicate a more robust and accurate relationship between teaching practices and improved reading comprehension by moving into direct observation of the strategies (rather than limiting the use, quality and frequency of strategies to teacher self-reporting). The knowledge gained in this area could potentially be beneficial for reading teachers in other national contexts and L1 languages.

In *Developing literacy at the beginning of secondary school through mythical tales and acting*, Podreau, Matrand and Legros report on a study conduct considering the effects of active and reflexive relationship between oral and written language by engaging middle school students in collaboratively creating plays for performance.

By participating actively with guided assistance, L1 and L2 students developed their competence in French oral and written language. The study also points to the use of creative drama and literacy as effective for advancing language skills particularly in classrooms with diverse student populations.

Integrating technology into mother-tongue education: Examples from Hebrew by Shalom and Nir-Sagiv position L1 education in relationship to new technologies for learning in schools. The paper discusses four options for integrating technology into the learning and teaching experiences of students in demonstrating two online courses as well as off-line possibilities for applying technology within L1 classrooms. In all, the emphasis is on the linguistic, rather than social, literary or cultural dimensions of teaching L1, Hebrew. In this timely inquiry, the authors establish a critical connection and environments where students actively participate in making choices leading to meaningful learning experiences. Teachers choose from a variety of tools that can be adapted and modified for individual learners. In applying technology to language teaching and learning, the authors explore and enrich the possibilities and create spaces for further inquiries into academic achievement, attitudes to L1 language/learning and the development of their linguistic awareness.

Each article preceding this final one, *The academic writing of teacher candidates: Connecting speaking and writing* by Kennedy, seeks to inquire into aspects of L1 education requiring a re-viewing of perspectives and practices that currently identify many classrooms around the world. As it turns out, however, teachers hold the key to any significant change in schools. Hence, understanding what teachers know, how they develop their knowledge and what support structures (ongoing professional development, for instance) need to be in place, becomes critical to operationalizing new theories and studies that can improve learning and teaching in schools. To that end, Eileen Kennedy begins with pre-service teachers, preparing them to participate in speaking and writing and simultaneously, begin to understand the effects that reach beyond the university class into the future classrooms of these pre-service teacher candidates. By modeling and analyzing the relationship between student-centered, group interactions and their effects on formal essays, the pre-service teachers in the experimental group demonstrated considerable improvement in their scores. The outcomes suggest a rich set of research questions that can follow this study particularly, from my perspective, for what this implies for elementary and secondary writing experiences. Studies could be done on the elementary and secondary levels to see if classroom-based discourse creates a bridge to more developed, classroom-friendly academic writing. In turn, this will mean a continuing emphasis on incorporating the dialogic, interactive discourses in pre-service and gradu-

ate teacher education classes to strengthen the writing of teachers entering and already practicing in the schools.

If, as the articles in this issue suggest, that change and re-thinking L1 educational practices are necessary in a diverse range of contexts and focused on a variety of elements (reading comprehension, literature, technology, writing, teacher education, for instance), then this issue provides a window into more diverse and rich landscapes for such investigations.