

Supporting Multilingual Learners in the Era of COVID-19

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This year, 2020, has been an exceptionally tough year. There have been multiple incursions on our social, political, and economic lives—COVID-19, the murder of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, and presidential proclamations barring foreigners from entering the U.S. These situations have directly impacted the psychology of students, teachers, parents, and administrators throughout Georgia and beyond and have forced educators to rethink, reshape, and redesign the teaching/learning space. This special issue is a response to the current climate in the U.S. and includes articles that focus on the changes, challenges, innovation, and instructional strategies that have affected the way we think about language, multilingual identities, second language instruction, and language program administration.

Evolution of Educational Ecosystems: Language Programs as Lived Experiences

The first article, by Bristow, is an illustration of how English Language Support Programs (ELSPs) are in themselves educational ecosystems made up of lived experiences. To navigate the new set of educational challenges for English language program administrators (ELPAs) in 2020, Bristow looks to the semiotic resources of ELPAs and how they mediate the social actions ELSPs take through a methodological and theoretical approach called Nexus Analysis. Throughout the article, Bristow exemplifies how Nexus Analysis can be used to navigate change in ELSPs by addressing problems and identifying pertinent solutions.

Baxter's piece is a practical narrative account of how one language program managed change effectively during the pandemic. Baxter and her team addressed multidimensional social, political, and economic problems head on and provided sustainable solutions. Baxter and her team dedicated time to promote diverse and inclusive materials in distance learning contexts to foster inclusivity and participation by offering accessibility, varied and relevant content, and opportunities for autonomy and self-directed learning.

Reconceptualizing Online Teaching/Learning Spaces for Multilingual Learners

The literature review on media literacy by Gaston showcases the importance of supporting multilingual learners to find truth in a world saturated with information, considering the current COVID-19 'infodemic' and the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation on social media. He makes the case for why media literacy education is needed for multilingual learners. Despite the number of issues teachers, administrators, and institutions have had rolling out a sudden transition to distance learning, Gaston shows how the current climate is a perfect opportunity to teach media literacy skills to multilingual students.

Aberle-Grasse's article forces readers to take pause and reconceptualize the value and impact of using language learning strategies to support multilingual learners' well-being. She argues cogently that language educators need to take into consideration the trauma of COVID-19 and the physical stress associated with the pandemic. To support learners during this unprecedented time, she addresses the emotional and physical needs of these learners by exemplifying how teaching language learning strategies increases a sense of self-efficacy. Thus, helping learners take control of their learning could have a positive impact on their ability to handle the recent trauma. Utilizing language learning strategies, such as goal setting, reflection, and peer-review, she argues, can support the development of an online community, which is needed in 2020.

The teaching technique described by Mbodj exemplifies how the software applications YouTube and PowerPoint, which are common (and affordable) to many teachers in Georgia and beyond, can help address students' learning differences. The techniques shared in this paper contribute to a more inclusive approach to online teaching by providing multilingual learners with the additional support they may need to comprehend course materials.

Disrupting Discriminatory Practices in TESOL for Identity Construction

Brittain draws our attention to the construct of Whiteness as a centered phenomenon in English language teaching (ELT), which contributes to discriminatory practices in TESOL through reliance on and privileging of White norms on a global scale. She explores how ideologies that reinforce White native-speakerism are demonstrated in open-source English teaching methodology training materials designed for global ELT audiences. Through critical discourse analysis, Brittain discerns that ELT materials have been designed to honor teacher agency and context; however, they also demonstrate contradictory, simultaneous representations of resistance to and reinforcement of ideologies of White native-speakerism.

Wang's article showcases the relationship between the arts and the world of TESOL and asks the following two questions: What role does arts/poetry play in (language) teacher education; and what can arts-based approaches offer in TESOL teacher education? She presents a thought-provoking case study of how a Chinese international graduate student—Meili (pseudonym)—negotiates and reconstructs her language teacher-poet identity in her emergent bilingual poems. Through analysis of three interviews, Wang articulates how Meili is able to challenge the long-existing norms and judgments surrounding nativeness in the field of TESOL by bringing her individual and multilingual voice to her poems.

Pao presents a form-focused lesson plan intended to help English as a Second Language (ESL) learners of East Asian origin communicate in the face of racial discrimination that has emerged due to COVID-19. The lesson takes a learner-centered approach to instructional design and adopts a pedagogy of particularity, meaning language instruction should be customized to a specific group of learners. The article sheds light on a relevant and timely topic that pertains not only to the language learning goals of these learners, but also their identities as immigrants of East Asian descent.

This issue of *GATESOL in Action Journal (GIAJ)* is indeed, GATESOL in action! It showcases the strength and power of our language teaching profession to rise up during a time of uncertainty and unpredictability to support the lives and well-being of the multilingual populations we serve. We hope this issue is also a vehicle for change. There is still a lot of work to be done, and as we look ahead, we see a brighter future that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive for all.