

Editorial Introduction

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his[sic] activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active co-operation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his [sic] studying. (Dewey, 1938/1997, p.67)

Nearly a century ago, educational researcher and philosopher John Dewey emphasized the integral nature of learner participation in the enterprise of education. Learners in modern times often participate in educational settings using digital technology and associate the use of such resources and modalities with a personalized and autonomous educational experience (Henderson et al., 2017). Indeed, educational technology research has argued that the use of digital technology may improve student participation (Giesbers et al., 2013), learner autonomy and self-regulation (Alioon & Delialioğlu, 2019), and learner satisfaction (Bond et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the use of digital technology for learning and teaching does not necessarily make the learning experience effective (Laurillard, 2013), and cannot guarantee positive outcomes, such as student participation, learner autonomy, self-regulation, and learner satisfaction.

Educational researchers Owens and Kadakia (2016) note that modern approaches to learning are more than mere applications of technology to learning to promote educational achievement and learner autonomy. According to their research, modern learning experiences typically have at least one, and usually several, of nine characteristics that can facilitate learning and student engagement.

1. **Accessible:** Materials and assessments need to be easy to locate and available when the learner wants to use them.
2. **Autonomous:** Self-regulation can facilitate a shift in responsibility for not only what is being learned but how, when, and where the learning occurs.
3. **Chunked:** Tasks and materials should be designed to be subdivided into smaller sections. For instance, short (two-minute) video clips or concise texts (250-300 words).
4. **Current:** The materials and assessments should be up to date or can be easily modified to keep the materials up to date.
5. **Experiential:** Learners should actively engage with the materials, both giving and receiving feedback; for example, low- or no-stakes formative assessments such as peer- and self-assessments.
6. **For me:** Materials and assessments are personalized for learners, such as teachers and classmates providing audio-recorded or video feedback to learners.
7. **Hyperlinked:** Materials and assessments capitalize on related information that is hyperlinked to help learners to expand on ideas and draw connections between concepts.
8. **MVAK:** Multimedia designed to provide learners with enhanced input that uses one or more Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetics modes.
9. **Social:** Design elements that promote interaction in a manner similar to social media, such as using likes, comments, number of views, and emoji to communicate information to learners. This also includes

other social elements such as crowdsourcing and face-to-face and virtual synchronous and asynchronous interaction to mentor or promote dialogue between learners and peers.

In the current volume, the selected studies have been grouped into three thematic sections, presenting readers with a set of distinct but related research on meaningful issues for a modern learning experience. The first three chapters present *professional and teacher development* perspectives and collectively shed light on how to develop, maintain, and improve pre and in-service teacher training and professional development. The second set of four chapters provide research findings that describe the results of direct applications of modern learning elements through *course assignments and teaching approaches*. The final five chapters focus on *critical thinking* and range in their focus from classroom-based studies to full-scale curriculum reform.

Section 1: Professional and teacher development

In Chapter 1, T.J. Ó Ceallaigh describes the impact of a blended learning professional development initiative for Irish-medium immersion teachers in the Republic of Ireland. The chapter outlines the impact and language learning benefits of integrating content and language in higher education within a blended learning professional development program. Ó Ceallaigh employed multiple synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning and interaction to represent and enrich the content of the learning. Drawing from seven data sources, the findings showed an array of merits to the approach, including evidence of increased and sustained student motivation and self-regulated learning, improved linguistic and pedagogical abilities, as well as community building.

In Chapter 2, Moonyoung Park and Wenqi Xiao present research findings on the instructional potential of incorporating concept mapping as a diagnostic and predictive assessment tool in a teacher

education program in Hong Kong SAR, China. This research shines a light on a novel method (i.e., concept mapping) of uncovering the relationships between pre-service teachers' knowledge structure and the task of lesson planning. Park and Xiao note the potential of concept mapping as one way teacher education programs can foster learner autonomy and self-regulation through self-assessment opportunities. The findings also suggest that a pre-service teacher's understanding of pedagogical theories and concepts may be different from their application of such concepts in classroom practice.

Chapter 3 is a multination report on improving teacher education programs and professional development opportunities in three countries, Bahrain, Oman, and The United Arab Emirates. Osama Al-Mahdi, Marloes de Munnik, Beatrix Henkel, Luke Meinen, and Marissa Green describe their successful implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) through examples taken from pre and in-service teacher training programs. The authors detail locally informed best practices with an eye towards changing school culture through collaborative initiatives, such as mentoring and coaching, and they identify problems with the system of preparation for school principals who aim to lead PLCs in their schools. Through a thorough review of literature on PLC and workplace learning, Al-Mahdi et al. offer an expanded and nuanced definition of PLCs that includes the notion of socio-material theory to further contextualize PLCs and the changes associated with them.

Section 2: Course assignments and teaching approaches

In Chapter 4, Brennan Thomas describes a media project for a university-level first-year composition course. Focusing on one unit from the syllabus, Thomas describes a roughly five-week-long public media project. Over the unit's lessons, students searched for and created media texts on social issues and topics affecting a range of people, from local citizens to people from around the world. This

project capitalizes on research from post-process perspectives and integrates the public and interpretative dimensions of writing as a tool to affect change. The findings describe how creating the multimodal artifacts improved participants' awareness of social issues and civic engagement while helping them to understand and use media texts to raise social awareness and encourage community efforts.

The topic of social issues is carried into Chapter 5, in which Emily Andrea Sendin narrates a college literature classroom experience of adapting digital escape rooms for a composition assignment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sendin applied the educational concepts of ownership and social and civic engagement to develop a virtual classroom that expanded the learning processes of participants to include accountability for one's escape room. The project also encouraged collaboration with classmates, which provided opportunities for students to become experts as they taught one another important skills and information. Each escape room was themed on a human rights violation or an example of social injustice and was designed to provide students with the knowledge and motivation to take civic action. In this chapter, Sendin successfully demonstrates how escape rooms can foster student engagement with the learning experience in the literature classroom through investigating social change and making a call for others to act for the betterment of society.

In Chapter 6, Sandra Healy discusses the impact of shifting to emergency remote learning in the teaching of college students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The author provides insights into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic through an analysis of student-made videos that were recorded as part of the coursework. In the data analysis, Healy employs the grounded theory, Steps Coding and Theorization (SCAT; Otani, 2007) that describes a storyline by connecting and developing identified themes in the data. The findings of the qualitative data analysis identified 12 themes, including feelings

of isolation, changes in motivation, a sense of increased agency, and reports of improvements in online literacy. The author advocates for the use of the 12 themes to form the foundation for the development and use of teaching practices that focus on fostering community and building connections in online courses. Healy closes with a call to train and use e-mentors to help mitigate some of the challenges faced by students learning online.

In Chapter 7, Oliva Kennedy investigates student and teacher perceptions on both traditional and innovative pedagogical approaches to teaching about plagiarism in a first-year composition course. Using the SCAT (Otani, 2017) coding framework, student reflections and interviews with teachers indicated a range of traditional approaches (e.g., teaching citation methods, providing rubrics, peer review and editing) were typically used by instructors. In one instructor interview, however, Kennedy unpacks an innovative pedagogical approach guided by Gretchen Rubin's (2017) Four Tendencies framework. Through an exploration of qualitative comments from student ratings of instruction, the author describes how phrasing assignment directions and classroom interactions through the Four Tendencies framework may have led to student satisfaction with the composition class and to students having an improved understanding of what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Section 3: Critical thinking

In Chapter 8, James Dunn provides a detailed account of the planning, design, and implementation of a critical thinking project aimed at reforming a reading and writing curriculum for second year EFL courses at Tokai University in Japan. The author explains how the curriculum employed a project book individualized for textbook content and language proficiency to foster critical thinking in the language classroom. The project introduced learners to reflective thinking, logical fallacies, and research skills through readings and

tasks that push learners to critically examine the information they use to gain knowledge and express their ideas. An end-of-term survey revealed that students' overall perception of the curriculum and tasks was positive, and a post-project questionnaire showed that many students held the perspective that they had improved their critical thinking skills and had attained some mastery over critical thinking, both within their major subject and in their personal lives. This year-long evaluation also highlights the finding that learners became more independent thinkers and better writers through the reading and writing course.

Identifying evidence of and establishing ways to assess critical thinking can be challenging if not elusive. In Chapter 9, Samuel Reid and Travis West explore ways of measuring critical thinking in a second language (L2) group discussion course on academic English. One major contribution that this chapter makes is to address the scarcity of resources for teachers to help learners effectively utilize critical thinking in spoken discourse. Through analyzing a corpus of L2 spoken discourse made in a group discussion task, tokens of spontaneous dialogue were used to measure the frequency of critical thinking displayed in an academic setting. Notably, the authors present data for critical thinking in a course that does not explicitly focus on critical thinking. Data were parsed into objective and subjective reasoning, and the authors provide a clear framework for how other teachers and researchers can replicate their framework. Other aspects affecting the display of critical thinking are considered, such as the structure of discussion prompts and the role of pronoun usage in relation to the subjectivity or objectivity of an idea.

In Chapter 10, Sean Gay reports on an implicit approach to teaching critical thinking in the L2 composition classroom. Focusing on a complete multi-premise argument structure, which uses two premises to support a viable conclusion, Gay utilizes action research methods to examine a Devil's Advocate writing assignment designed to

foster critical thinking and analysis in academic English. The Devil's Advocate is a timed-writing activity through which learners compose position statements that argue against a prevailing position. The data from a treatment group and a control group are used to suggest that taking a dissociative stance on an issue can have positive effects, yielding improved critical thinking as represented by multi-precise argumentation.


In Chapter 11, Adam Gyenes and Luis F. Santos tackle critical thinking in an L2 English for Academic Purposes (EAP) listening course using talks and focused work in coursebooks to simultaneously develop critical thinking and listening skills. The authors provide an overview of how critical thinking is comprised of both top-down and bottom-up processes which are essential to an integrated model. Based on this framework, Gyenes and Santos identify cognitive and affective barriers to listening from the learners' perspective. The authors present five activities for use with TED talks that utilize various perspectives of an integrated model of listening that supports top-down and bottom-up processes. The underlying structure of TED Talks is considered in relation to approaches to understanding topics from critical and reflective perspectives.

Definitions of critical thinking abound, but in Chapter 12, Jay Tanaka presents a study that proposes the value and merit of teachers presenting a locally relevant and clearly stated definition of critical thinking. This pedagogically focused definition of critical thinking was crafted to encourage EFL students to explore and present information found on social media sites. Tanaka begins by describing an epistemology of critical thinking, then moves on to explore dispositions that facilitate and support or inhibit critical thinking, as seen from an integrated skills perspective. Through this framework, the author suggests, students can explore comments on social media to deepen their understanding of society and the social issues that affect and influence society itself. Tanaka discusses student perspectives in

the evaluation of the nature of this approach to teaching critical thinking, which the author argues is necessary to the process of distinguishing critical thinking from alternative perspectives that are reductive and non-critical.

The collection of chapters presented in this volume represents the eclectic nature of modern learning experiences and demonstrate its applicability across educational contexts and disciplines. It is my hope that the chapters will resonate with other educational researchers in search of novel ways of creating, facilitating, and investigating modern learning experiences.

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