Editorial

As basic general education was introduced – and eventually made compulsory – for the masses in Europe in the 18th and 19th century for the purpose of nation building and the socialisation of individuals for citizenship in the emerging nations (Boli, Ramirez, & Meyer, 1985; Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Zinkina, Korotayev, & Andreev, 2016), it became very highly institutionalized and was mainly conducted in centralised, formal schools not because of the cost efficiency these offers, but also because this arrangement facilitated systematic quality inspections (Wright, 2012) and the standardisation of curricula (Meyer et al., 1992). Mirroring this development, language learning has similarly come to be concentrated in formal classrooms, although, as Benson and Reinders (2011) contend, it is common knowledge among teachers that the progress made by students who learn languages only in the classroom tends to be limited, especially in their ability to use the language for spoken or written communication as contrasted with receptive skills. Well-rounded communicative proficiency, it seems, depends to a large extend on the learner’s efforts to use and learn the language beyond the walls of the classroom. (p. 2)

Elsewhere in the educational literature, many have argued for the need to situate learning away from the classroom, in real-life contexts where the knowledge acquired and constructed will be used. This will enable more effective learning and deeper conceptual understanding, and facilitate the connection of new information to one’s prior knowledge (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Krajcik, & Blumenfeld, 2006; see also in this issue: Barres; Kukulska-Hulme). Drawing on sociocultural theory, Lave and Wenger (1991) situate learning in communities of practice, that is, in those areas where the constructed knowledge is expected to be applied. Learning is a process of active social participation in and takes place in the negotiation and (co-)construction of knowledge with the community. Translating Lave and Wenger’s Situated Learning Theory into foreign language teaching and learning practice, one can easily understand the need and the value of connecting learners to, and enabling their linguistic and social participation in the target language communities (see e.g. Chan et al. in this issue) – thus extending learning beyond the local classroom.

Furthermore, the advances achieved in technology and its pervasive presence in practically all aspects of life today provide means to support learning beyond the classroom (Reinders & Benson, 2017; Pegrum, 2014) and necessitate a shift in educational paradigm to explore the notion of ubiquitous learning (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), which Bruce (2009) characterises as follows:

At its core the term [ubiquitous learning] conveys a vision of learning that is connected across all stages on which we play our lives. Learning occurs not just in classrooms, but in the home, workplace, playground, library, museum, nature center, and in our daily interactions with others. Moreover, learning becomes part of doing; we do not learn in order to live more fully but rather learn as we live to the fullest. Learning happens through active engagement, and significantly, it is no longer identified with reading a text or listening to lectures but rather occurs through all the senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. (p. 21)

Bruce’s vision of ubiquitous learning encapsulates challenges to the conventional concept of education that other educational researchers have similarly raised, such as the blurring of the traditional institutional, spatial and temporal boundaries of education (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), and the integration of formal, intentional learning in the classroom with contextualised, incidental learning in real life (Benson, 2011). Indeed, technology now has the power to not only help learners conveniently search for new information and learning resources in the Internet (e.g. on linguistic and cultural aspects), access target language inputs (e.g. media articles and video clips), and to communicate with speakers of the target language (e.g. through chat apps and social media); it can also be
used to bring learners together to learn a language, communicate and collaborate synchronously or asynchronously in virtual classrooms, forums, chats and wikispaces, and so forth.

Collected in this special themed issue of e-FLT, titled “Learning in and beyond the Classroom: Ubiquity in Foreign Language Education”, are 14 articles which report on efforts to extend learning beyond the confines of the classroom for second and foreign language learners and student teachers, ranging from out-of-class linguistic landscaping projects and immersion study in target language countries to the use of SNS and mobile technologies to enable online communication and to meet specialised learning needs. They will also examine and present critical issues related to these projects, including the underlying theoretical and conceptual frameworks, the integration of in-class and out-of-class activities, learners’ autonomy, the involvement of and participation in the wider community, as well as the projects’ effectiveness and learners’ satisfaction.

In the opening article of the issue, Keith Barrs reports on the application of a project-based learning in his English course at a university in Japan. Through their semester projects, students engaged with the critical investigation of English in the Japanese linguistic landscape and deepened their understanding of the forms and functions of English. Barrs argues that the linguistic landscape can provide a rich learning environment beyond the classroom in EFL contexts where opportunities to explore and engage with English are limited. Furthermore, the insights gained from the projects helped the students identify and formulate possible topics for their graduation theses.

Shinji Sato, in the second article, views the goals of language education as not just teaching and learning the standard forms of language and culture, but also actively participating in communities as a full member, using the language already mastered as well as the one being taught. He reports on examples of how this vision can be realized by incorporating project-based activities, which he calls the Social Issue Project and the Community Involvement Project, into the existing Japanese language curriculum. He emphasizes that language teachers must see their students as individuals who actively and creatively engage in the world, society, and communities, bringing their wealth of knowledge to bear on languages and cultures.

The third article, contributed by Wai Meng Chan, Daniel Kwang Guan Chan, Seo Won Chi, Kwee Nyet Chin, Sasiwimol Klayklueng and Yukiko Saito, presents a mixed-methods study on the impact of short-term study abroad on the intercultural development of university learners of six different foreign languages. Qualitative and quantitative data gathered through various instruments reveal that the study abroad programmes had a positive effect on the development of the learners’ intercultural competence. The positive development is attributed mainly to the learners’ interactions with and participation in the target language societies, including social encounters with host families, student buddies, and other members of the local communities.

In the fourth article, Wataru Takahashi and Tae Umino present a longitudinal case study on learners’ engagement with extensive reading (ER). Three types of ER (classroom-based ER, out-of-class ER, and autonomous out-of-class ER) are identified and the effectiveness of out-of-class ER sessions is investigated through two rounds of semi-structured interviews, conducted seven months apart. Based on their findings, the authors discuss if and which aspects of the out-of-class ER could encourage autonomous ER, and conclude with pedagogical implications and suggestions to enhance learner autonomy beyond the classroom.

Akiko Sugiyama, Atsuko Sajiki and Hitoshi Horiuchi, in the fifth article, investigate how novice teachers’ experiences of conducting action research in a teacher education program affect their teaching and their ability for self-development. They conducted in-depth interviews with four graduates of the program, who participated in a three-semester long Japanese language teaching practicum in Japan and abroad. The results indicate that their action research experience has an impact on their daily teaching and that the reflective skills they develop during the practicum may continue to be a powerful tool for their professional development over the long term.

In the sixth article, Jo Mynard and David McLoughlin inform us about a four-year longitudinal study that sought to examine how learners of English at a university in Japan sustain their motivation to engage in self-directed study outside of class. The article presents and analyses interview data collected during Phase 2 of the study, spanning the first two years, from participants of self-directed learning modules offered by the university’s Self-Access Learning Center. They uncovered that the nine participants’ personal learning goals as well enjoyable and interesting experiences they had
helped maintain their motivation in their self-access learning in Year 1. However, it was further ascertained, that for all three participants that remained in Year 2, there were clear shifts in their motivational orientations.

Agnes Kukulska-Hulme, in the seventh article, provides and discusses theoretical frameworks to inform the use of mobile technologies to support the social integration and language learning needs of newcomers to a city or country in this era of globalisation. She discusses specifically three research projects focusing on migrants’ learning through mobile devices to illustrate innovative and practical solutions. She concludes that custom-designed mobile learning experiences can support newcomers’ language learning and exploration of the new environment, as well as relevant issues and future directions for the design of mobile apps and services.

The eight article by Ronnie Shroff, Christopher Keyes and Lian-Hee Wee focuses on the way gamified pedagogy can support language learning. Indeed, digital game-based components such as scores and rewards – as seen in a phonetics app – are useful for engaging and motivating learners, while presenting them levels of challenge and goals to make their learning more exciting and rewarding. The visual and audio aspects of the app play a role in capturing and maintaining learners’ attention. The connections made by learners between images, text and sounds contribute to reinforcing their cognitive skills.

In the ninth article, Motoko Iseki Christensen presents a study on the interactions between Japanese language learners and native speakers engaged in communication on a social network site (SNS). This study contributes to our understanding of the factors that influence the role of participants in SNS discussion forums, especially the provision of scaffolding and native speakers’ roles. By analysing the data based on a sociocultural activity system model, she argues that the SNS discussions were able to foster collaborative learning; yet not every group was able to achieve collaborative learning.

Bozheng Liao, in the tenth article, examined synchronous online writing platforms as a tool for collaborative writing and language learning. He analysed the oral and written interaction in the collaborative writing – using the synchronous writing platform – between native speakers (NS) and nonnative speakers of English (NNS) with special reference to Language-Related Episodes (LREs) found in the interactions. It was found that the oral and written interaction show different types of LREs, NS and NNS have different perceptions of the benefits, and several factors influence the interactions in collaborative writing.

The eleventh article, written by Takeshi Sato and Tyler Burden, examines the impact of learners’ information processing styles in learning English as a foreign language (L2) within multimodal environments. Their study claims that the manipulation of images for successful L2 learning depends on learners’ tendencies in processing knowledge with imagery. The results suggest that successful L2 learning requires multimodal knowledge representation and may be enhanced by materials that differ according to learners’ cognitive styles.

In the twelfth article, Tony Cripps describes a Japanese university course on “Teaching with Technology”, designed to equip EFL student teachers with the skills necessary to teach in a world in which technology is increasingly becoming pervasive in education and life. It also prompted course participants to reflect on the role of technology in EFL as well as their own readiness to harness technology for teaching. The data collected show that while the students clearly recognised the importance and potential of technology, they were nevertheless not as confident about being able to use this technology for teaching. In concluding, Cripps argues for the inclusion of more and longer courses to prepare pre-service teachers pedagogically for the application of technology in teaching and for ubiquitous language learning.

Monika Szirmai, in the thirteenth article, relates how Moodle – as a virtual extension of the teacher – provides the teacher with insights about the students’ learning behaviour and makes it possible to influence student behaviour and motivation through its different settings. On the students’ part, Moodle increases their time-on-task and improves the quality and effectiveness of their out-of-class work. She discusses how also different factors, such as past experience with online systems, access to IT devices and work habits affect the level of satisfaction of the students in using this online learning environment.
In the fourteenth and last article of this issue, Muzzammil Yassin looks at how blended learning (BL) through the use of media online tools and in an e-learning environment can help address certain challenges faced by teachers of Arabic as a foreign language. In particular, BL helps to promote problem-based and autonomous learning, while providing the opportunity for them to become familiar with the modes of input or fonts that are specific to the target language. On the flipside, online lessons typically require significant amounts of preparation work by the teacher and are less effective than classroom lessons for teaching new concepts.

References


