

INTRODUCTION

Gerard Sharpling and Richard Smith

This special edition of *ELTED* explores cross-cultural concerns in English language teacher education and development. On the one hand, the reasons for this focus require little explanation. It has always seemed entirely natural and self-evident that English language teaching practitioners, wherever they are trained and based, should be well-versed in cross-cultural concerns, given that they will be likely to meet and teach students from varied cultural backgrounds, or to provide insights into cultures that are different from their own. In the present era of globalisation, English language teachers are, more than ever before, required to demonstrate a ‘cross-cultural literacy’ which enables them to learn and teach effectively across geographical and cultural boundaries. In the past, however, there has tended to be a rather naïve, relatively crude stereotyping of cultures into ‘national learning types’, with national affiliation often being seen as determining attitudes towards language learning. Yet increasingly, language teaching and learning are being viewed as processes that involve negotiation between cultures, rather than the dominance of one culture over its weaker counterpart. This ‘postcolonial’, and perhaps ‘postmodern’ emphasis underlies the selection of papers for the present issue of *ELTED*. A commitment to negotiation brings with it the need to be sensitive to the strengths and potentialities of all cultures, and the importance of not measuring practices within various cultures against a given ‘norm’ (usually in the past, in the English teaching world, a white, anglo-saxon one). The pursuit of equal opportunities is now a key characteristic of English language teaching in a way that was not so clearly the case before.

A number of recent historical developments have enhanced the importance of cross-cultural issues within a wider, and arguably more complex English language teacher education and development framework. Among these developments have been the opening up of China to the outside world through its ‘Open Door Policy’ of 1979, the fall of the Berlin wall and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain in the 1980s and 1990s, and the increasing numbers of international students within English-speaking higher education institutions. One corollary of these developments is that there are a number of cultures whose English teaching practices are not yet well known or understood by others, and from which much is still to be learned. Nadezhda

Yakovchuk, in her article in this volume, provides an exposition of the trend towards global education in Belarus, while she also explores how this ideal, as evidenced in Belarus, is viewed by a range of experienced teachers from other nationalities. Yakovchuk's article both elucidates current beliefs, trends and practices within Belarus, taking account as they do of inter-cultural issues, and invites experienced practitioners across cultural boundaries to comment and exchange views on this trend. Auhoud Albelushi, meanwhile, provides an overview of the status of female English teachers within her country, Oman. Her article is more overtly oriented towards the issue of career development. Albelushi articulates the way in which teaching in Oman continues to be viewed as the most suitable and acceptable career choice for women. Teaching, she argues, is often selected by women because of its perceived convenience in enabling women to juggle their careers and domestic lives. Its perceived cultural acceptability also has much to recommend it. Nevertheless, the findings of the article confirm that the opening of the workplace to women in Oman may lead, paradoxically, to increased stress, as women are required to confront a series of often conflicting expectations and demands.

Of all countries, it is perhaps China that is most readily called to mind when the issue of globalisation within teacher education is considered, given the expansion of English teaching there and the increasing numbers of Chinese students in English-speaking countries. There is no doubt that the area of teacher education and development within China itself merits closer attention, and is only gradually coming to be more closely researched. Qing Gu's article meets this need by focussing on the impact (within Chinese institutions) of the 'institutional strengthening projects' facilitated by the UK Department for International Development. Her paper purposely avoids the imposition of a fixed paradigm of teacher development, preferring to draw on field data gained from extensive questionnaires and interviews with Chinese teachers of English. Qing Gu's research highlights the importance of inter-cultural training in enabling teachers to locate an appropriate balance between tradition and innovation. Such a training can also assist in helping teachers to develop appropriate teaching methodologies. Yet Qing Gu's article also recognises that certain factors, such as an individual's assumptions, beliefs and expectations about teacher education programmes and about language teaching itself, may inhibit the implementation of teacher education programmes in international contexts, or at least make this a more complex practice.

Gerard Sharpling's article on cross-cultural issues in testing students' writing again focuses on the Chinese context. He stresses the importance of looking at language testing *within* the context of China itself, rather than imposing Anglo-American norms on student writing, norms which are driven more by statistical, mathematical and segregating practices than justifiable, locally appropriate ones. Like Qing Gu, Sharpling avoids the imposition of a fixed paradigm or model, and views testing (like teaching) as a process of negotiation in which each culture can learn from the other. Sharpling rejects the ethnocentric approaches that have tended to characterise more mathematically-based language testing practices, and sees language testing rather as a humanistic procedure, and a venue for inter-cultural exploration. Within China, Sharpling argues, there are language tests that can stand up to scrutiny as being valid and reliable indicators of language proficiency. Again, the process of 'negotiation' lies at the heart of Sharpling's paper. It is the responsibility of the language tester to engage actively in inter-cultural issues and to seek reflectively to develop appropriate testing practices.

One particular aspect of teacher development that has received considerable attention in recent years is the debate surrounding the relative strengths of native and non-native speaker teachers of English. Within a globalised teaching profession, this debate is gradually resolving itself through the realisation that teaching skills, as well as good language proficiency, are an essential key to success in the classroom. Ilana Salem's article contributes to this debate through its investigation of the way in which a teacher's native language (as well as the proficiency level of their class) affects their attitudes to student error. In her analysis, Salem charts the way in which native speaker teachers and their non-native speaker counterparts tend to view error differently. Importantly, however, she also adds nuances to the category of 'native speaker teacher' by introducing the concept of 'detached' EL1 teachers. These are teachers who 'grew up in an English speaking country but now live and teach in a non-English speaking country' (p. 62).

The issue ends with an appreciation by Richard Smith and Alan Maley of the life and career of Lionel Billows, who died earlier this year. Billows was a pioneer in the field of ELT whose work in Southern India in the late 1950s first established the 'cascade training' model still favoured by the British Council and other agencies today. From a cross-cultural perspective, while the attempts of Billows and his successors to introduce 'alien' methodologies into countries like India can be

criticised, with hindsight, for their inappropriateness, Billows himself showed wisdom and cross-cultural sensitivity in asserting that ‘success would be dependent on the process being an organic, co-operative growth and not just a filling up of empty receptacles’.

As editors, we hope that collectively the six papers in this volume will help to further de-centre the discussion of English language teacher education and development away from narrowly Western concerns, and contribute to an emerging view of these processes as involving negotiation between cultures in a mutual and open-minded spirit of theoretical and practical enquiry.