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Editorial: In 2020 and beyond



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On a snowy afternoon, I was slowly waking up from what felt like a long bad dream. In the recovery room, I heard nurses chatting behind the curtains waiting for me to wake up from the anesthesia. As I slowly gained consciousness, I patted my belly, only to realize there was no longer any signs of life and growth, there remained nothing but silence in my womb. A nurse came by and noticed that I had been awake. She spoke a few words through the curtains as she opened them six feet away and sat down to work on my discharge papers. That is when she looked at my face, immediately put her arms around me and said, “I know. I know.” I did not even notice until this moment that I had woken up with tears streaming down my face.

After months of isolation, what happened in a hospital recovery room after my late miscarriage made me think more about the ideas of presence, connection, and interaction in a socially and physically distanced world. With nearly no exception, all of us have experienced loss and grief during the midst of COVID-19, sometimes in silence. Many of us have adjusted to a whole new way of being in the environment that was thrust upon us. Everything was suddenly moved online as institutions closed abruptly; educators and their students grappled with the sudden, emergency transition from face-to-face classes to unfamiliar online platforms. Because of the uncertainty and continued isolation, students faced numerous issues. For some, basic needs of housing or food were limited, let alone comparative luxuries such as access to technology.

More than ever, researchers and practitioners have considered the questions of what it means to be present, connect with, and contribute to the world around us. Students have continued to adjust to the new normal while learning different ways to engage and communicate online. In the area of language teaching and learning, researchers have continued to work on the ways in which technology affords language learning, despite the imposed stigma surrounding the effectiveness of online learning during the pandemic. Educators have continued to find ways to best support student learning during the time of “Emergency Remote Teaching” (Hodges *et al.*, 2020), while willingly participating in trainings and workshops with topics surrounding new technology and its possibilities.

However, in all capacities I am certain we have equally discovered our own shortcomings when we encountered a student who has withdrawn to the void, as well as a student who did not have the basic means to participate in an emergency remote teaching. Many of the shortcomings indeed have stemmed from our own assumptions about what we thought about presence, connection, interaction,

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engagement, and affordance when teaching and learning with technology. What can we do to show presence when it is most needed in the world? How can we connect theories to practice, our expertise to larger audience, and most importantly, how can we better engage and connect with each other when the world is in isolation? What can we all do, in our own capacities, to improve our practice and well-being while making sure that no learner left behind?

After the cessation of in-person classes, a number of terms such as “online learning” “remote learning” “virtual learning” “digital learning” “hybrid learning” have been used more substantially by large audience, and those terms were often used interchangeably without any distinctions between. Some scholars warn against this mixed use, calling for further research to reexamine the specific added values including both online and physical exchanges, and how we can potentially find the overarching balance in a multimodal and distributed learning environment (Colpaert, 2020; Hodges *et al.*, 2020). At the theoretical level, this is an important inquiry that requires immediate attention. There is a need, more than ever, for scholars in wide range of disciplines to work together and redefine what is virtual, what constitutes social presence, and what constructs connection in the given learning environment.

Despite the challenges we have faced in 2020 and beyond, I remain hopeful to see the continued research activities and ongoing submission of papers by colleagues in the field, and *Technology in Language Teaching and Learning* is no exception. As we celebrate the publication of this combined issue, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our contributors, staffs, and editorial board members who have worked tirelessly and devoted their time and resources to make this journal possible. It is this ongoing commitment that gives us the sense of hope and perseverance and further, provide us with the belief that we have everything we need to keep moving forward, together. In this issue, we have featured three original papers by the following contributors: Yijen Wang, who discusses a comparison of teaching resources for learning Chinese in Japan, namely computer-based, smartphone-based, and paper-based; Moayeri and Khodareza who explore the effects of mobile-assisted language learning on speaking accuracy of learners of English as a Foreign Language in Iran; and finally, Mashaal Alqahtani and Sultan Altalhab, who look at the impact of using blogs on summary writing skills of EFL university students in Saudi Arabia.

We hope this issue brings you insight and new perspectives into how each of us can contribute to the advancement of technology in language teaching and learning. Finally, I will conclude my editorial by thanking all the teachers, scholars, and readers of this journal who have been pivotal to the continuation of education through the turmoil while facing their own struggles, pain, and challenges behind the scenes. You are not alone. As we look to the future, we wish you all a new beginning filled with good health, healing, and strength to carry on your teaching and research in 2021 and beyond.

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