
Editorial: Australian TESOL contexts; a state of flux

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The factors influencing the multiple contexts of English language provision in Australia are complex, and this issue of TESOL in Context holds a lens to some of them: the first of the three articles presents a historical overview of provision for English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D, formerly English as a Second Language or ESL) in Australia, the subject of the second is screening for EAL kindergarten children, and the third discusses issues of internationalisation in a K-12 school. Reading these we are reminded that as TESOL professionals we work in an environment of continual change, forced to respond in a frequently *ad hoc* manner to a number of pressures, including federal and state politics. As far back as 2002 Joe Lo Bianco expressed concern (in this journal) that EAL/D learner needs were still not being met at that time, and the three articles in this issue throw light on why this is still too often the case, despite recent legislative emphasis on a 'fairer Australia' (Australian Government, 2011) in which a stronger acknowledgement, understanding and support for linguistic diversity should provide the foundation for a socially just society.

In *ESL in Australia- A chequered history*, Oliver, Rochecouste and Nguyen review the historical phases of English language teaching in Australia, in the adult and school sectors. They trace the provision of English as a Second Language from postwar immigration, through multiculturalism, changes in education policy, and developments in the teaching of second or additional languages, to the current environment of national assessment regimes. We are reminded of how postcolonial monolingual attitudes delayed the implementation of specific programs for teaching English to school-aged learners. Separate support was eventually established but a move to mainstreaming was followed by the restriction of federal support in 1997 to new migrants only; at the same time the burden of support was shifted to state

governments, which has made provision more precarious.

Evolving pedagogies in the adult and school sectors are also reviewed; the authors point out that although methodology has remained eclectic in practice, a common unfortunate interpretation of language needs as influenced by the pressures of the national testing regime (NAPLAN), has resulted in a strong mainstream literacy and numeracy focus for EAL/D teaching, at the cost of foundational language needs. The introduction of the national curriculum and assessment processes are actually counter to the trend of devolving funding responsibilities to the states and therefore to individual schools. In response to these complex factors, funding for English language teaching has been inconsistent, and provision has required continual adjustment to meet changing contexts.

The shift of perspective from ESL to EAL/D is acknowledged as a more positive appreciation of linguistic diversity, not least because it takes into account indigenous Australian students, whose language needs continue to be problematic despite their proficiency in various linguistic codes within classrooms. The article concludes that the profession of English language teaching in Australia, along with its continuing problems around professional recognition, still suffers from unstable foundations, with the strong implications that more consistent support in policy and funding is required.

The focus of the second article, *Language shades everything*, is the youngest population of EAL learners in Australia. In an investigation of an Allied Health screening program conducted in three kindergartens in a socio-economically disadvantaged area of Melbourne, Keary and Kirkby used narrative inquiry methodology to investigate the understandings of Allied Health professionals, Early Childhood teachers and administrators in relation to children referred to in the Health sector as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD). With the aim of increasing benefits to linguistic and academic ability as well as enhanced metalinguistic development and social growth, they identified a perceived need for all stakeholders to develop flexible assessment practices, to acknowledge EAL children's existing linguistic abilities, and to establish family-centred practice.

Their main argument is for targeted professional learning to assist Early Childhood teachers in negotiating the space; this would aim to create learning opportunities that support language and early literacy growth, and inform judgments about the educational needs of multilingual and multicultural children. Collaboration

with Allied Health professionals could assist with the construction of assessment tools; such joint endeavours might initiate a shared vision of rich, descriptive assessment that would lead to better understanding of the early learning of multilingual and multicultural children, and reduce the risks to development of their language, communication and cognitive skills, as well as their physical health and wellbeing, and their social and emotional competences, all of these being domains in which over 20% of children have been assessed as vulnerable.

Key concerns familiar to EAL specialists working in mainstream contexts are raised in our third article, *Internationalising a school*. Hattingh, Kettle & Brownlea offer a case study of a kindergarten to K12 faith-based school in an environment of increasing internationalisation in Australian schools, a phenomenon highlighted by Oliver et al in the first article. In investigating teachers' perspectives on the changing educational, cultural and linguistic profiles of their students, the authors discuss pedagogical and curricular responses implemented to meet the changing needs of students, and how teachers are managing the process, revealing and analysing their concerns. The study indicates that non-EAL specialists at the school were interested in the benefits of greater cultural diversity in their classrooms but felt they lacked the means to foster it successfully. The teachers in the study referred to a lack of support from the school itself in this regard, as they felt internationalisation was imposed in a top-down fashion with little or no negotiation. Acknowledging a lack of confidence, and the need for support within the school for developing further their understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity, many non-specialist teachers felt that EAL students should be the responsibility of the specialist teacher.

Related issues arising were difficulties with managing EAL student participation in class, and confusion regarding the relationship between language and literacy. With regard to the former, while EAL specialists may be aware that pedagogies of participation are culturally-imbued and highly contextualised, non-specialist teachers of EAL, unsure of appropriate scaffolding techniques, tended to place responsibility for initiating participation in class activities on the EAL students. Regarding the latter, a widespread belief represented was that students should learn English to the level of high school proficiency before enrolling at the school; the authors point out that this view conflates language development and academic literacy, ignoring the point that

‘genres of power’, as Luke (1996) terms school-based academic genres, need to be learned and taught, as they are often unfamiliar for students from other educational systems.

The authors argue it is crucial that the views of teachers as frontline workers in the increasing internationalisation of schools in Australia are represented, and that internationalisation must be a whole-school endeavor. It involves many innovations, including recruitment of academic language support staff and translators, adjusting curricula, realigning school identity, and most importantly, improving pedagogy to include the pedagogies of English as an additional language and understandings of culture. The article concludes with implications of these concerns for teachers’ practices and professional development, and for the place of international students in the school community.

In this issue there is, for the first time, a review of a website resource as well as a book review. The free resource, *English for Uni*, is a site offering grammar explanations and practice with a focus on academic English, designed for teachers and intermediate level students. It was developed by Julia Miller and a team from a variety of Australian Universities as an OLT-funded project.

The book reviewed in this issue, *The Plurilingual TESOL teacher*, represents fifteen years of work by Elizabeth Ellis on an area on which there has been mostly silence; the work explores what teachers who have been through language learning experiences themselves bring to the classroom. Plurilingualism as a term includes a variety of levels of language learning experiences that other terms such as bilingualism may obscure. By including native and non-native English speaking teachers in this investigation it further undermines the usefulness of these binary terms. Language *learning* awareness is a concept developed for this new area of research, and the book concludes convincingly that learners benefit in multifaceted ways from being taught by someone (with good teaching skills, it is acknowledged) who has undergone language learning experiences themselves.

This is the final print issue of *TESOL in Context* before the journal switches to an online open access platform. It is also the first to be co-edited by one of two new editorial teams, so we would like to take the opportunity to say thank you to ACTA for their continuing support for the journal. We would also like to thank Lawrence Gerry for his editorial assistance over the last year and to welcome as the new editorial assistant Xuan Thu Dang (tic@tesol.org.au)

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