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Editorial

As we indicated in the previous editorial, by popular demand we will be introducing an exciting new section called ‘Practical teaching ideas’, in which teachers will be able to share ideas which have worked for them in the classroom. This section will be introduced in Volume 17 in 2002, and we hope you will all send in your ideas as soon as possible. Details of how to submit contributions to this section have been included in ‘Notes for contributors’. We very much look forward to a flood of interesting ideas and activities, and urge you all to send in the fruits of your experiences in the classroom. Don’t delay. Do it now!

In this issue, we are delighted to bring you one of the plenary sessions from last year’s National AMEP conference: the address presented by Alister Cumming on the topic of conceptualisations of ESL writing curricula. Drawing on interviews with highly skilled instructors of ESL writing in a number of countries where English is either dominant or important as an international language, Cumming argues that the AMEP has taken a comparatively unique approach to ESL writing curricula. Compared with the views expressed by instructors from the other countries in the study, he found that those interviewed from the AMEP shared a theoretical foundation for their approach to ESL writing, a commitment to the integration of writing with other areas of the curriculum and a conception of students’ purposes for learning English in both specific and general terms. Cumming also concludes that the AMEP differs from other programs in its emphasis on common standards and accountability in assessment procedures, and argues that these trends accord the AMEP a relatively unique status among ESL programs internationally.

While Cumming focuses on teachers and the curriculum in the AMEP, the second article by Helen Lunt raises issues about the learning style of individual students within the AMEP. On the basis of interviews with learners, Lunt argues that their preference for working alone or within a group was based on their age and awareness of their own learning, as the younger learners in her study reported choosing to work either in a group or alone according to the nature of the task in hand, whereas the older learners seemed to make choices which helped to alleviate their anxiety and to compensate for what they perceived as their inadequate memory. While Lunt concedes that her findings should be interpreted cautiously, she suggests that classroom teachers be sensitive to the underlying motivations that learners may have in choosing to work in a group or alone.

The next two articles in this issue continue this focus on the classroom, addressing two aspects of classroom culture which generally receive little attention: gender construction and the use of humour. In the first of these, Kieran
O’Loughlin focuses on the importance of classrooms as sites for the production and regulation of gender. Taking the perspective that social identities (including gender) are constructed through language use, O’Loughlin explores the crucial role that teachers play in the ongoing construction of learners’ social identities and argues that teachers should shoulder the responsibility of developing pluralistic approaches to gender. This involves not only acknowledging and respecting the gender roles which learners bring to the classroom from other cultures, but also being sensitive to the diversity of gender roles available in Australian society. In this way, learners may be helped to find the gendered spaces in which they will feel more comfortable.

Rose Senior explores classrooms as social units and the role that humour plays in developing and maintaining class cohesion. From interviews with teachers and classroom observations, Senior documents the way in which humour was pivotal in the development of social cohesion. Although there is as yet little evidence that class cohesion enhances learning, she found that the teachers in her study were nevertheless convinced that this cohesion was productive, and therefore placed a high value on the use of humour as a resource in the classroom.

The final article, by Pat Strauss, raises the topical issue of using group assessment in classroom situations in which both native and non-native speakers need to be assessed. The large class sizes which are increasingly a feature of educational institutions create a climate in which teachers are often under pressure to streamline their assessment procedures and adopt new approaches. One solution to the problem of assessing learner outcomes in such classes is to use group projects. This article by Strauss examines this issue in some detail, and explores the pitfalls of group approaches to assessment for both L1 and L2 students. A range of advice for teachers is offered.

Two reviews of practical teaching texts aimed at two rather different groups conclude this issue. The first, by Pam Luizzi, provides an overview of Activity Box – A resource book for teachers of young learners, a book of practical ideas for those teaching the 11–14 age range. The second, by Helen Basturkmen, evaluates Academic listening encounters: Listening, note-taking and discussion, a text designed for use in programs of English for Academic purposes.
Notes on contributors

Helen Basturkmen teaches courses in Academic Speaking, Course Design and Discourse Analysis at Auckland University. She has publications in the field of academic discourse.

Alister Cumming is Head of the Modern Language Centre and Professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Canada. His research and graduate courses focus on writing in second languages, student assessment, and curriculum evaluation in language education, and research methods.

Helen Lunt has taught in ESL/EFL and teacher education programs in Australia, China, Finland and the UK, and has also been involved in several language testing projects. She is particularly interested in teacher education and classroom research, specifically the areas of motivation, learning styles and strategies.

Pam Luizzi is currently working as an ESL Project Officer in the LOTE, ESL and Multicultural Education Branch of the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training. She is based at the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC). She has previously taught ESL students as a classroom teacher and as an ESL teacher in both primary school and English Language Centre settings.

Kieran O’Loughlin is a lecturer in TESOL education at the University of Melbourne. Prior to taking up this position he taught ESL/EFL in Australia and France to both secondary students and adults for many years. His research interests include social identities in language learning and teaching as well as language assessment. He has recently completed a book for Cambridge University Press entitled *The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests*.

Rose Senior has many years of experience as a language teacher and teacher educator, particularly in the area of teaching intensive English to students from non-English speaking backgrounds. In 1999 she completed an award-winning doctoral study of social processes occurring in selected classes of adult language learners. Her present work includes running workshops for practising teachers on how to develop cohesion in classes of language learners. She is currently Joint Director of Program Development for the School of Languages and Intercultural Education at Curtin University.

Pat Strauss is a senior lecturer in the School of Languages at the Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand. She is interested in exploring the difficulties faced by L2 students in mainstream classes, assessment issues in second language teaching and aspects of teacher education.