Editorial

This issue brings together articles which examine various aspects of rather different teaching and learning settings both within Australia and overseas. The first three articles in some way tackle an important aspect of what different students bring to the learning situations in which they find themselves. The first, by Karen Slikas Barber, investigates some of the difficulties that students from the Horn of Africa studying in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Australia appear to have in writing assessment tasks. Although these students are often very fluent in their spoken English, their literacy skills may be at a much lower level, and, as Barber notes, teachers frequently report little discernible improvement in their writing skills during their time in the AMEP. Barber reports on both the strengths and weaknesses that seem to characterise the writing of these learners, and explores possible reasons why they may have difficulty in acquiring writing skills in English. She provides a useful outline of some strategies that have been used in the classroom to address their writing and learning needs, and identifies those strategies which appear to be the most useful.

Focusing on learners from a Japanese background, Tatsuya Taguchi investigates the relationship between what the learner brings to the classroom and the language learning strategies that they appear to use in both an ESL context in Australia and an EFL context in Japan. Using a revised version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990), Taguchi found that gender, level of English proficiency and motivation levels were the main factors which appeared to affect the strategies that learners reported using in both contexts. On the basis of her results, Taguchi makes some recommendations for both teaching and for classroom organisation.

In a study of language learning in a rather different setting in provincial Indonesia, Martin Lamb considers the particular challenges which face learners of English in a developing country, and addresses the intriguing question of how it is that a few individuals do succeed in achieving competence in English even though opportunities to hear and use the L2 are very limited. The results of his exploratory study illustrate the difficulties of learning English under these conditions, and suggest that personal investment in learning, and the autonomy and resourcefulness to pursue their goals independently seem to be characteristics which are important in explaining the success of the few individuals who do achieve proficiency in such unfavourable circumstances.

In the fourth article, Jack Migdalek draws on Bourdieu's (1990) concept of *habitus*, or practices which are performed below the level of consciousness, and Goffman's (1965) notion of *rehearsal*, to propose that learning to use the
spoken language of another culture is a physical activity which requires both learning and practising what he calls ‘embodied language practices’ as well as verbal skills. He argues that many students are unaware of how the habitus of their native language influences the way they use spoken English, and illustrates how a teacher can intervene to raise their consciousness of the differences between their native language habitus and ways of interacting that are more appropriate to English-speaking cultures.

A different kind of cultural and linguistic learning is addressed in the final article in this issue by Gee Macrory, who reports on the acquisition of the professional discourse of foreign language teaching by students training to become foreign language teachers under a mentoring system in England. Macrory explores their experience of learning the discourse of their new profession as they undertake a one-year postgraduate teaching course, in which two thirds of their training is undertaken in school. She found that, although initially daunted by the range of terminology to be learned, the student teachers saw the importance of acquiring a discourse which would allow them to discuss and reflect on their experiences as teachers. Macrory concludes, however, that a unified discourse that is shared across the two contexts of school and university is still more of a desideratum than an actuality.

The issue of mentoring is also taken up in the first of the three book reviews in this issue. Kamyin Wu reviews one of the rare practical resources for school-based mentors, Mentor courses: A resource book for trainer-trainers by Angi Malderez and Caroline Bodoczky, and concludes that it is a useful volume that fills a gap in the literature in this area. Jennie Lynch reviews a new Language Australia volume and CD designed to offer support to both novice and more experienced onliners, Beyond Babel: Language learning online, and Virtual language learning revisited, both by Uschi Felix. Finally, Margaret Hennessy reviews a new addition to the series of Oxford Introductions to Language Study, Language testing by Tim McNamara.

REFERENCES

LYNDA YATES
Book reviews

Mentor courses: A resource book for trainer-trainers

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Reviewed by Kamyin Wu

In initial teacher education, the term ‘mentor’ refers to any teacher or tutor who is responsible for some aspect of the training of student teachers. Mentoring has attracted increasing attention in recent years owing to the emphasis on university–school partnerships and school-based teacher education. Yet, although there is now a large literature on how school-based mentors can support and facilitate the professional growth of beginning teachers (for example, Goodwyn 1997), there are few practical publications on how mentors themselves can be trained. Mentor courses is a very useful resource book which fills this gap.

Addressed primarily to trainers with a responsibility for school-based mentor training, the book consists of three main parts. It also includes an Introduction, a Conclusion, and a set of photocopiable resources. The Introduction defines what a mentor is and explains the organisation of the activities in the book. The rest of the book is then divided into three major parts. Part I sets out some basic mentor course principles. It draws on insights from constructivist theories of learning, and suggests that effective mentoring training should rest on the following principles:

- Start from the mentors’ existing knowledge, experience and beliefs.
- Raise mentors’ awareness of different aspects of mentoring.
- Help mentors engage in reflective practice.
- Provide challenge so that mentors can expand their knowledge and skills.

Part II contains activities, based on the above principles, for use during sessions on a mentor course. These activities serve a wide range of functions, for example, breaking the ice, generating the course participants’ need to know, improving their lesson observation skills, helping them to select appropriate techniques to intervene in student-teachers’ growth, and guiding them to assess their mentees’ teaching practice. The various sub-skills are worked on first (Chapters 3–5), before they are brought together in the role-plays (Chapter 6) for integrated practice. Part III is a shorter collection of activities for use between sessions. Intended as assignments, the activities involve peer lesson observation and reading and writing tasks.
Each activity in the book follows the same basic format: Aims, Suggested position in course, Suggested position in session, Materials, Timing, Assumptions, Classroom organisation, Procedure, Variations, Comments, Participant reaction and Acknowledgments. While most of these headings are fairly standard, the Comments and Participant reaction sections are rather special to this book. In the Comments section, the authors give their personal opinions on each of the activities, for example, whether they found the activity a success when they tried it out (for example, pp 42–3), the difficulties they encountered in using the activity (for example, p 129), and practical hints for those who plan to use the activity in their own courses (for example, p 126). Where appropriate, the authors also give a summary of the major conclusions arising out of the activity (for example, pp 108–9). These conclusions should be very useful to those teachers who wish to improve their mentoring skills but who are not attending any course. The Participant reaction section contains comments from the course participants themselves. Not surprisingly, these comments are largely positive, though less favourable remarks are included as well (for example, p 52). Irrespective of their nature, the participants’ comments do much to enliven the description.

The book finishes with a conclusion, which gives practical suggestions for disbanding the participants and helping them to pursue continual professional development.

In general, the activities in the book are creative, original and, judging from the participants’ comments quoted, useful. The use of ‘I-statements’ (Activity 4.6), for example, is a simple, yet extremely powerful technique for developing non-judgemental lesson observation skills. Pictures (p 155) add a fun element to the learning process, making it game like. The Butterflies task (pp 85–6) uses a moving and memorable text to bring home an important message: In their enthusiasm to promote the professional development of student-teachers, mentors must be sensitive to the mentees’ needs and stage of development, so that they do not use inappropriate intervention to inadvertently curb growth instead!

Another strength is that the book provides valuable resources which mentors can adapt and use in their own context. For example, the teaching practice evaluation form (p 204) is useful for appraising mentees’ teaching competence, while the end-of-year evaluation form (pp 213–15) can be used by the mentees to evaluate their school experience. The book also explains theoretical concepts (for example, ‘constructivism’ and ‘interteaching’) clearly and concisely. In particular, the two figures ‘The Teacher Iceberg’ (p 15) and ‘The Mentor Iceberg’ (p 18) present in a concrete way how knowledge and beliefs play a significant role in determining behaviour. Mentors are thus alerted to the problems of focusing on the observable only when working with student-teachers.
Against these positive features, the book suffers from unhelpful cross-referencing in some places. For example, Activity 3.7 is cross-referenced to 'mentoring metaphors', but there is no indication that 'mentoring metaphors' is in fact another activity in the book, and no page number is given. Similarly, when ‘I-statements’ is mentioned on pages 92 and 95, readers are not referred back to the page where the term is first introduced. The book also leaves some technical terms unexplained, for example, ‘syntactical schemata’ (p 74) and ‘neurolinguistic programming’ (p 91). This may create a comprehension obstacle for those without the relevant background and training.

Despite these limitations, Mentor courses is a valuable addition to the literature on mentoring. It would be of interest and value to anyone who is involved in the training of school-based mentors, as well as to those who are on MA or M Ed programs.

REFERENCES
Beyond Babel: Language learning online
Felix, U 2001. Melbourne: Language Australia

Virtual language learning revisited (CD-ROM)
Felix, U 2001. Melbourne: Language Australia
Reviewed by Jennie Lynch

As in all areas of education, language teachers are faced with the explosion of Internet sites for language learning. We are overwhelmed when we begin to explore the Web: grammar sites, chat sites, reference sites, publishers’ sites, commercial sites; the list goes on! We wonder if we should be part of it all and make the foray into online teaching. We wonder what students really think about language learning online, and whether it does indeed enhance their learning. Felix, in her 2001 publication, Beyond Babel: Language learning online has given us some direction in tackling these issues. The book is a practical, readable, broadly based text on language learning online, and is accessible whether we be novice onliners exploring the range of Web-based resources available, or experienced developers in the Web environment. In addition to the printed text, a CD-ROM is conveniently provided, which allows instan-
taneous access to the sites covered in the text.

Building on her 1998 text, Virtual language learning, her latest work, Beyond Babel: Language learning online is divided into three sections. The first provides a forum for teachers to share their experiences of their online courses, the second offers a huge annotated list of useful sites organised under language, from Chinese to Spanish, and categorised in a variety of ways. The third section reports on research into students’ perceptions of learning a language online.

Part 1, ‘Development: Doing it with more or less’, presents the reader with eight different stories of developing language learning online, in German, Chinese, Japanese, English as a Foreign Language and a Second Language, Korean and French. In each chapter, the writers give an honest account of the positive and negative experiences in developing their particular language on-line. We are able to gain an insight into the reasons why these people have developed online material, the pedagogical and theoretical underpinnings of the courses, the factors involved in instructional design, the evaluative tools used to assess their courses and, in some, students’ perceptions of their online experience. Not only does this section provide for a range of contexts and levels of language learners, the reference lists at the end of each chapter are also a valuable resource.

Part 2, ‘Practice: Virtual language learning revisited’, uses 18 categories in which to provide a short review of many sites. Each category then has languages
listed alphabetically. The categories include ‘Publishers’ sites’, ‘Magazines and creative writing’, ‘chat sites’, ‘integrated materials’, and ‘grammar and grammar-based materials’. Although handy to look through in the text, this section is most useful on the CD-ROM, as the sites can be personally evaluated at a single click of the mouse. The choice of categories is extremely useful as it provides not just easy access, but also a framework for teachers to conceptualise how they may utilise the Web for language teaching and learning. A further time-saving tool in this section is an index by language, so we can quickly find sections relevant to the particular language we are interested in.

Part 3, ‘Research: Absolutely worth the effort!’, reports on research into the question ‘Do students perceive this environment to be viable for language learning?’. Two studies are described and synthesised under the heading ‘Delights and dilemmas’ of online teaching and learning. It seems the advantages of online learning outweigh the disadvantages, but this section does confirm the need for more profound research to be undertaken to investigate not only student perceptions of the environment, but also to evaluate whether, and in which areas, computer-based learning can make a difference to the outcomes of student learning.

*Beyond Babel: Language learning online* is a valuable resource for all language educators interested in online teaching and learning. It offers a wide range of carefully chosen resources, organised in a logical and appropriate format. Of course, the only concern is that the site listed today may disappear tomorrow! So be quick to explore the Babel that Felix has provided.
Language testing
Reviewed by Margaret Hennessy

This little book forms part of the Oxford Introductions to Language Study. Like the other books in the series, this one is in four sections: Survey, Readings, References and Glossary.

The eight chapters of the approximately 80-page first section, Survey, present a broad overview of the various aspects of language testing. Chapter 1 introduces different types of language tests. Paper-and-pencil tests and performance tests differ in their design or test method. While paper-and-pencil tests are conventional examination papers which assess components of language knowledge or oral and written comprehension skills, performance tests involve an act of communication through which the productive skills of speaking and writing are assessed. The chapter also covers the differences between achievement tests and proficiency tests. Achievement tests, which gather data during or at the end of a course in order to determine progress, are important in alternative assessment, and measure past learning, while proficiency tests ‘look to the future situation of language use without necessarily any reference to the previous process of teaching. The future “real life” language use is referred to as the criterion’ (p 7). There follows a discussion of the relationship between test and criterion. Stressing that testing ‘is about making inferences’ (p 7), McNamara points out that test performances, which represent criterion performances, can be observed and then used to make inferences about criterion or target performances, which are subsequent to the test and unobservable. He argues that although tests may be relatively realistic, ‘they can never be real’ (p 8), and raises the issue of test validity, which is taken up in a later chapter.

Chapter 2 is about test construct, or ‘those aspects of knowledge or skill possessed by the candidate which are being measured’ (p 13). It presents a brief history of language test design, and the ways in which tests have reflected the view of language held by the test designers.

Chapter 3 looks at the stages of test development, without managing to paint a clear picture of the processes in question. It touches on activities ranging from establishing test content and determining test method, through producing test specifications and test materials, to trying out tests and gathering test-taker feedback.

Chapter 4 discusses rating and its associated problems. On the problem of the subjectivity of ratings, McNamara remarks that ‘the rating given to a candidate is a reflection, not only of the quality of the performance, but of the qualities as a rater of the person who has judged it’ (p 37). Another problem
he notes with ratings is that ‘the idealized view of native speaker performance still hovers inappropriately at the top of many rating scales’ (p 42). He also highlights the problem that rating scales are often not fine enough to measure student progress. Towards the end of the chapter, there is a relatively detail-free explanation of the difference between holistic and analytic rating.

Chapter 5 is on validity. ‘The purpose of test validation in language testing’, writes McNamara, ‘is to ensure the defensibility and fairness of interpretations based on test performance’ (p 48). After mentioning face validity, the chapter looks at potential threats to test validity – content, method and construct – before moving to the question of the impact of tests and the concomitant issue of consequential validity.

Chapter 6 could be characterised as an extended glossary of measurement terms. It moves from a section on quality control for raters, where the ‘correlation coefficient’ and ‘classification analysis’ are explained, through a section on the properties of test items, which describes ‘item facility’, ‘item discrimination’ and ‘reliability’, to a section which points out the difference between ‘norm-referenced’ and ‘criterion-referenced’ measurement before making a brief mention of Item Response Theory.

Chapter 7 places language testing in its social context. McNamara identifies two views regarding the ethics of language testing. The first view is ethical language testing, which ‘holds that language testing practice can be made ethical’ (p 71), that testers have the responsibility to ensure that tests are ethical, and should be accountable. Test-takers should be fully informed about the tests that they take, and these should be demonstrably relevant to them. He argues that ethical language testers should be concerned also with the effect of tests on teaching and learning, or ‘washback’. He discusses critical language testing, according to which ‘the principles and practices that have become established as common sense or common knowledge are actually ideologically loaded to favour those in power, and so need to be exposed as an imposition on the powerless’ (p 76).

Chapter 8 considers some of the advantages and disadvantages of technology-based testing before examining the question of whose performance is being assessed in a joint communicative activity. Towards the end of this last chapter of the Survey section of the book, McNamara warns that ‘in the dazzle of technological advance, we may need a continuing reminder of the nature of communication as a shared human activity, and that the idea that one of the participants can be replaced by a machine is really a technological fantasy’ (p 85).

The 33-page Readings section which follows provides extracts from the language-testing literature which are organised under the chapter headings of the Survey section. Each extract is accompanied by questions relating to it, and
sometimes explicitly to other extracts or to the Survey chapters. This section is perhaps the best in the book, although many of the questions would be challenging, to say the least, for someone whose background reading consisted only of the Survey section of this book. The References section is a ten-page annotated bibliography, again organised under the chapter headings of the Survey section, with each reference coded for level of accessibility. The final section is an eight-page Glossary including page references to the Survey section at the end of each entry.

In the Preface to the book, the series editor, H G Widdowson, states that the purpose of the Oxford Introductions to Language Study is ‘not to supplant but to support the more academically oriented introductions to linguistics: to prepare the conceptual ground’. He argues that the academic texts, although ‘excellent in their way’, can be ‘quite daunting to the novice.’ (p xi). Quite frankly, though, I cannot imagine, at least as far as this particular book in the series is concerned, who this ‘novice’ might be. It seems to me that anyone wishing to find out about language testing is doing so in order to somehow apply the knowledge in their professional activities. And if that is their goal, they would be doing themselves a disservice not to read from the outset a book that is far less general than this one.
Notes on contributors

Karen Barber is a lecturer with the Adult Migrant English Program at Central TAFE in Perth. Her interests lie in researching the teaching of writing and in improving the educational and vocational pathways of students with high oracy skills but lesser literacy skills. Currently, Karen and two of her colleagues are writing a reading and writing textbook with vocational content at a CSWE II level with funding from the Western Australian Department of Training. In 2002 she will conduct research in the context of AMEP Research special projects on writing for students from the Horn of Africa.

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Martin Lamb is a Lecturer in Education (TESOL) at the University of Leeds, UK, while pursuing part-time doctoral research into the motivation and language learning behaviour of Indonesian adolescents. He previously worked as a teacher and teacher trainer in Sweden, Bulgaria and Indonesia.

Jennie Lynch is a language and academic skills (ESL) lecturer at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Her interest is in the pedagogy and practice of online language teaching and learning. She is currently involved in teaching university credit ESL subjects online.

Gee Macrory has been a Senior Lecturer in the Institute of Education at The Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, for the past 12 years. Prior to this, she taught in state schools for seven years and was an Advisory Teacher for the local education authority for two years. Her current responsibilities are for modern languages teacher education for primary and secondary schools, and also include training in the field of English as an additional language. Research interests include teacher education and first and second language acquisition.

Jack Migdalek teaches English and Drama for the Foundation Studies Program, Trinity College, Melbourne University. He holds a Master of Education in Language and Literacy from Deakin University, for which he was awarded the Dean’s prize, 1997. He has taught English in Japan, and has worked professionally in theatre and theatre in education in Australia and the United Kingdom. Publications include *Embodying practices across cultures* (thesis – Deakin University 1997), *Making conversation* (Intercom 1996) and articles in *The Language Teacher* (JALT). Jack has delivered workshops and papers (‘Making conversation’, ‘Drama in the language lesson’ ‘Doing English’) at seminars and conferences for LMERG, ELICOS, Melbourne University Hawthorn ELC, Monash University Faculty of Education, Monash University ELC and most recently at JALT’s national conference 2001 *A Language Odyssey*, Kitakyushu, Japan.
Tatsuya Taguchi completed his masters in TESOL at the University of Melbourne in 2001 and has taught English in Japan. His research interests include second language acquisition, corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics.

Kamyin Wu has taught ESL at secondary and tertiary levels. He has also worked as a teacher educator and curriculum developer. He is currently doing research on teacher cognition and developing learning materials for a teacher education course.