Editorial

This issue of *Prospect* reflects the wide range of current issues within the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and covers a range of educational settings in Australia, New Zealand and Thailand. Two articles focus on issues in course design in English for specific purposes, one on Sudanese high school students, one on the role of Scrabble® in the adult classroom and another on the satisfaction of clients in English language centres.

In the first article, John Walker reports on a study of the satisfaction of clients in English language centres across New Zealand compared with staff perceptions of client satisfaction. His data show a gap between staff perception and client satisfaction, with staff perceiving clients to be more satisfied than they actually were. He therefore argues for effective quality feedback procedures so staff have accurate information about how their clients view English language centre services. He also cautions that such feedback may uncover unrealistic expectations on the part of clients.

In the next article, Jenny Miller and Jane Mitchell report on case studies of Sudanese refugees with interrupted schooling who are learning in Victorian high schools. Through focus group interviews with teachers, they investigated both the challenges teachers face teaching these learners and also teachers’ perceptions of the learners. For teachers, the greatest challenges were how to adapt instruction for learners whose previous experiences have not prepared them for Australian schooling, the lack of suitable texts and resources, and the different attitudes of English as a Second Language (ESL) and mainstream teachers towards these learners. The ESL teachers found these learners to have unrealistic expectations and difficulties with interpersonal relationships on campus. They caution, however, against constructing these challenges and differences as deficit view of the students.

Gavin Melles, using a case study approach, examines a three-week bridging program for international medical research students in their third year of a Bachelor of Medical Science degree at an Australian university. The program, using a team-teaching approach with discipline faculty and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) staff, integrates EAP instruction into content teaching so that the EAP aspects are both incorporated into the program and offered in a coherent, sustained manner, compared with the more common standalone workshop or tutorial approach. He notes that, while challenging for the EAP lecturer, such an approach benefits both students and teachers.

In the next article, Howard Warner and T Pascal Brown study the use of Scrabble® as a teaching tool with an upper-intermediate class of adult ESL learners, which included both immigrants and international students.
study revealed that these learners enjoyed playing Scrabble® and believed such enjoyment was an important part of learning, but also felt they were learning language through this game. The study explored issues of game length, time, number of players, competitiveness and the use of dictionaries. They also suggest further research, including how teachers incorporate Scrabble® into their syllabus, the acquisition of vocabulary and the game’s effect on autonomous learning.

In the final article, Graeme Ritchie reports on methods for creating materials based on authentic nurse–patient dialogues to develop the syllabus for an English for Special Purposes course in nursing. One source of such data was transcripts of unscripted role-plays with fluent English speakers, one of whom is a medical professional. The second source was from learner transcriptions of teacher–learner role-plays, in which the learner took the role of medical professional and the teacher the role of patient. Ritchie notes that the latter provides scaffolded learning, and learners and teacher co-construct the text (transcript). The use of both types of texts provided him with the content, and thus the language features, of the syllabus.

The two reviews pick up on themes in the articles. The first, by Kieran O’Loughlin of *Exploring the dynamics of second language writing*, an edited volume by Barbara Kroll (2003), covers a range of issues in writing, including feedback, genre, contrastive analysis, learning and teaching, and the role of writing in a language syllabus. Some of these issues are also addressed in the articles of Miller, Mitchell and Brown (literacy), Ritchie (genre) and Melles (research writing). The second review, by Keith Simkin, is of *How different are we? Spoken discourse in intercultural communication* by Helen Fitzgerald (2002). While none of the articles in this issue discusses intercultural communication explicitly, the findings in Fitzgerald’s research and recommendations to teachers complement the unscripted dialogues of Ritchie and provide useful insights for teachers in Miller and Mitchell’s study and expand a theme Walker discusses concerning the reluctance of some learners to be critical of their programs.

I thank the anonymous reviewers of the articles in this issue, whose perceptive analyses and reviews helped authors and editor alike. Also, thanks to Gillian Wigglesworth, the Reviews Editor, and Kris Clarke, the Production Supervisor, for helping to ensure this issue appears on time. I also thank Lynda Yates, the Editor of *Prospect*, for this opportunity to guest-edit an issue while she is on extended leave. We will all welcome her back for the final issue for 2005.

DENISE E MURRAY
GUEST EDITOR
Exploring the dynamics of second language writing
Reviewed by Kieran O’Loughlin

This collection, edited by Barbara Kroll, provides an excellent, up-to-date overview of the expanding field of second language (L2) writing. The book is divided into the following five parts:

I  Exploring the field of second language writing
II  Exploring the voices of key stakeholders: teacher and students
III Exploring writers’ finished texts
IV Exploring contextualities of texts
V  Exploring technology.

Each part, consisting of one or more chapters, is introduced by the editor. In her introduction to Part I, Kroll (p 11) locates the roots of L2 writing research in North America. Chapter 1, by Paul Kei Matsuda, provides an historical perspective, which supports this claim. Matsuda traces the evolution of L2 writing as an interdisciplinary field emerging from the interaction between composition studies and L2 studies. He argues that the field will maintain its relevance in the future by continuing to ‘draw on and contribute to other domains of knowledge that may influence L2 writing instruction’ (p 28). Chapter 2, by Charlene Polio, gives a summary of the main research themes in the field to date, including key studies. These themes include writers’ texts, writers’ processes, participants in the learning and teaching process and, finally, the context of L2 writing both inside and outside the classroom. This chapter would be extremely useful for postgraduate students and others embarking on research in this area for the first time. Polio’s approach is critical as well as descriptive in so far as she discusses the strengths and weakness of the research that has been done in each of these areas. She calls for more studies on what actually happens in writing classrooms and L2 writing in foreign language contexts.

Part II consists of two chapters (Chapters 3 and 4): the first (by Alister Cumming) explores the ways in which experienced English as a Second Language (ESL)/English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing instructors conceptualise their teaching; the second (by Tony Silva, Melinda Reichelt
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and five L2 writers) examines how successful L2 writers understand their learning. Cumming’s chapter reports on the findings of interviews with 48 ESL/EFL writing instructors about their teaching, while the chapter by Silva et al uses learner narratives to help us better understand the process of learning to write in an L2. Both chapters contain valuable insights into teaching and learning L2 writing.

Part III deals with the exploration of writers’ finished texts. It contains three chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7): the first, by Dana Ferris, about feedback on student writing; the second, by Jan Frodeson and Christine Holten, about the role of grammar in writing courses; and the third, about the assessment of writing, by Liz Hamp-Lyons. I found this part of the book very stimulating, especially the chapters by Ferris and Hamp-Lyons. The chapter by Ferris provides a survey of research on teacher–student conferences, as well as written teacher and peer responses to student writing highlighting student attitudes to different kinds of teacher and peer feedback. The chapter by Hamp-Lyons provides an overview of reliability, validity and key themes in writing assessment research including the writer, the task and written texts, as well as scoring procedures and their complexities. She also highlights the strongest theme in current research in writing – and indeed other areas of – L2 assessment, namely impact or ‘the uses of tests and their scores beyond the classroom and the understanding of the power for good or bad that test scores carry’ (p 167). This line of thinking has implications for other kinds of classroom-based assessment as well.

Part IV explores the contextualities of writing through four quite different perspectives. In Chapter 8, Anne Johns examines the issue of genre and how it relates to L2 writing instruction. In Chapter 9, Ulla Connor re-visits contrastive rhetoric, arguing that this view of student writing provides helpful insights into the link between language, culture and genre. In Chapter 10, William Grabe examines the important relationship between teaching L2 reading and writing, and in Chapter 11 Stephanie Vandrick argues strongly in favour of the use of literature in L2 writing programs.

Part V looks at the role of computers in the delivery of writing courses. In Chapter 12 Martha Pennington examines this question with reference to a wide range of media including word processing, networking and the World Wide Web. She suggests that the computer has transformed literacy and that L2 writing teachers need to harness recent technologies to promote their students’ writing development.

The Epilogue by Ilona Leki ends the collection on a cautionary note. She argues provocatively that L2 writing teachers need to ‘ask ourselves if we
are exaggerating the importance of writing and, if so, with what consequences to learners’ (p 327). This is a timely reminder that learning to write is only one aspect of L2 development. Leki suggests that teachers need to understand the place of writing in students’ present and future lives (academic, professional and personal) and maintain a balanced view of its significance.

In my view this is an excellent book on L2 writing from both theoretical and research perspectives. It would be an extremely useful resource for postgraduate students and experienced researchers, as well as for practising teachers. Admittedly, it is limited by its almost exclusive focus on adult (mostly academic) English writing contexts. However, researchers looking at other L2 settings should still find most, if not all, of the chapters in the collection highly relevant to their interests and concerns.
How different are we? Spoken discourse in intercultural communication


Reviewed by Keith Simkin

The question mark in the title alerts us to Helen Fitzgerald’s underlying argument that English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers should focus on the implications of the convergences, rather than the differences, in learners’ spoken discourse. She shows that the communication strategies of students from different language and cultural backgrounds are situationally flexible and can be adapted through training to achieve mutually comprehensible discourse with others.

Fitzgerald supports this argument with evidence from 40 hours of videos and audiotapes of discourse among 155 adult English learners, from 104 countries, studying in ESL orientation and English for Professional Employment classes in Canberra. All were high school graduates, and many were university graduates and professionals in their countries of origin. Their competencies ranged from ASLPR 1+ to 2+ (a few were above). Fitzgerald taped them discussing eight problem-solving situations. For example, they had to decide which one of seven critically ill heart transplant patients should receive the single available donor heart; to recommend whether the local high schools should be coeducational or single sex; to deal with a workplace problem involving cultural diversity; and to role-play the introduction of an AIDS curriculum into a multicultural secondary school. She looked at whether learners’ cultural backgrounds influenced the values expressed in communication, their discourse organisation and rhetorical styles, their turn-taking and their approaches to assertiveness, disagreement and conflict.

If we focus on the empirical research sustaining this book, however, we risk under-emphasising its contribution to our understanding, which I think is considerable in at least three areas. With clear, concise summaries and analyses, it makes available much of the theory from intercultural communication and discourse analysis relevant to informed and reflective ESL teaching. It suggests strategies through which ESL teachers and workplace trainers can improve language and communication knowledge and skills in learners. Beyond its immediately instrumental value, the book offers insights into important issues for ESL teachers, including the role of culture in language teaching, the use of critical incidents and culture assimilators, and the vexed question of whether or not Australian cultural behaviours and values should be taught overtly.
Fitzgerald has performed a valuable service to ESL teachers by wrapping her empirical discourse analysis in critically constructive syntheses of relevant theoretical frameworks from intercultural communication and discourse analysis. For example, her discussion of communication styles synthesises the early work of Hall on high and low contexts with the last decade of comparative research from Asia, Australia, the USA and Europe (including that of Clyne, Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Lustig and Koester, but not, surprisingly, of Guo-Ming Chen) on stylistic modes. She clarifies the differences among the communicative styles of learners from South Asia, South-East and East Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. ESL teachers and learners can learn from this analysis that these stylistic differences are imported into English communication with powerful effects. They are neither good nor bad, but must be recognised and adapted for productive learning. By treating theory and practical application in alternating chapters, the structure of the book is extremely helpful.

In the concluding chapter, Fitzgerald reviews the implications of her empirical research for ESL teachers and workforce language trainers. Some of her suggestions are general guidelines familiar to experienced teachers, such as giving learners ‘tasks requiring or encouraging collaboration and inclusivity, non-controversial topics and [using] participants whose styles [are] more equally matched in terms of fluency and volubility’ (p 206). She points out, however, that with training, her groups achieved success when participants were able to shift positions and see another’s point of view, when they practised a high level of inclusivity and interactivity, and when one or more of the participants took a facilitating role, injecting humour to defuse tense situations.

Her advice on intercultural training focuses on the provision of knowledge and awareness rather than on directly attempting to reduce racial prejudice. She shows how conditionals and tags are effective softening devices in requests and commands, turn-taking routines and interrupting. She diagnoses effective use of varied communication styles in matters relating to directness, involvement, specificity, distance, warmth and non-verbal language. Given the confusion often expressed by ESL teachers about what and how to teach in intercultural communication, this suggested priority list should be a valuable starting point for discussions in staff rooms and professional association meetings. Also important for professional consideration, I believe, is Fitzgerald’s insistence that learners’ communicative behaviour is situational, sensitive to teachers’ behaviour. There are no recipes.
This book offers many insights into important issues for ESL teachers. It argues that culture learning is not only inevitable in language learning but is passionately desired by learners as an overt part of the curriculum. It advocates a learner-centred, problem-solving and discursively based learning environment and an ethical stance described by Fitzgerald as ‘ethno-relativism’. This means in practice an overt training program in intercultural communication skills that provides learners with the opportunity to function more successfully in the local Australian context by increasing their critical awareness of, and skills in, Australian cultural practices. Her argument here is bolstered by the views of a majority of her students: that learning to be critically aware of their own and Australian communicative styles had helped them to function more effectively in Australia and to make sense of experiences that had previously been difficult to understand.

I have listened to several discussions about this book among ESL teachers in different working situations – schools, community agencies, universities and training organisations. Some people think it covers too much ground and is theoretically and methodologically ‘thin’. Others think its discourse analyses are too long, too detailed and (in the case of the discussion on values) too flimsy. Yet others find it the most valuable and carefully crafted contribution to teaching culture in language that has been written in Australia. I am in this last camp. I am an enthusiastic user of this book and can’t see myself kicking the habit for a long time.
Notes on contributors

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Gavin Melles is lecturer in the Faculty International Unit of the faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne. He has a Doctorate of Education from Deakin University and a Masters in Linguistics from the University of Costa Rica. He currently supports higher degree by research students in the Key Centre for Women’s Health and also works as a concurrent support lecturer for the AMS International program.

Jenny Miller is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Monash University. She has completed research on immigrant and refugee students in Queensland high schools, in particular related to speaking English as a second language and social identity. She has published widely in the field of applied linguistics and identity theory. Her book, Audible difference: ESL and social identity (2003), published by Multilingual Matters, is cited widely internationally.

Jane Mitchell is a Senior Lecturer in Education at Monash University. She has previously held positions at The University of Queensland and Charles Sturt University. She has co-authored a major teacher education text concerned with pedagogy in secondary schools. Her main research interests focus on teachers’ work and professional learning, and the relationship between curriculum, culture and student engagement.

Kieran O’Loughlin is a Senior Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Melbourne. He has worked in the field for many years as a teacher, teacher trainer, manager and academic. His current research interests include second language assessment and English for Specific Purposes.

Following several unhappy years as a postdoctoral biochemist, Graeme Ritchie fell in love with Thailand and TESOL. He is an instructor on the Master of Arts (TESOL) course at Payap University in Chiang Mai and has a Master of Education (TESOL) degree from Edinburgh University.

Keith Simkin teaches at the School of Educational Studies at La Trobe University in the areas of intercultural communication, multicultural and social sciences education.
John Walker has taught English and managed language programs in various locations around the world. He now lectures in Management at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. His research interests include ELT/TESOL management, service operations management and languages in business.

Howard Warner was a graduate student at Unitec New Zealand, Auckland. He is New Zealand’s top Scrabble® player and an internationally ranked Scrabble® player.