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Editorial: Non-themed issue: 2010

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The decision to have regular non-themed issues of *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* was made by way of Board consultation some time ago. As a Board, we believe that the policy of having a panel of guest editors taking control of a "themed" issue has worked well. In many cases, guess editors have worked together for the first time in a common enterprise. In all cases, having panels of guest editors has expanded the reach of the journal, increasing its subscriber base and the number of distinct educational constituencies who view the journal as a desirable target for contributions. It has facilited the journal's aim of providing "a place where authors from a range of backgrounds can identify matters of common concern and thereby foster professional communities and networks".

The decision to have non-themed issues was to allow for potential journal contributors to effectively determine what is topical for them in terms of research interests and theoretical concerns. It was a way of "taking the pulse" of the L1 English teaching profession to see what turned up. As it transpired, this issue has provided an interesting range of contributions covering a range of themes, some of which may well be taken up in future themed issues.

The National Writing Project in the US is considered by many to be the most successful and most sustained professional development project ever for English/literacy teachers (Wood & Lieberman, 2000; Whitney, 2008). Calls have been made to build on similar projects that begin in New Zealand and England in the 1980s but which were never sustained (see, for example, Andrews, 2008). Teresa Cremin and Sally Baker, in this issue, draw on the "Writing is Primary" (WisP) project, which was undertaken in three areas of England in 2007-8 The project put a focus on the experience and practice of the teacher as composer, and viewed as important the expansion of teachers' knowledge and understanding of the multidimensional process of writing. In broad terms, this project subscribed to the simple notion that if teachers identify as writers, their classroomn practices will change, and these changes will have a positive bearing on the performance and motivation of students as developing writers. However, as the two case study teachers discussed in this article illustrate, the writing classroom can be a site of struggle and tension, as teachers perform and enact dual roles as "teacher-writers" and "writer-teachers".

The question of assessment of writing is a perennial and vexed one. A particular tension is between top-down and bottom-up approaches to assessment. One manifestation of this tension is between generic, standards-based and often high-stakes technologies for assessing writing (even when these are touted as "diagnostic")

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and particularised, site-based, relative-to-genre, rubrics which are generated out of negotiated understandings of the requirements for a particular text to be successfully produced in a real-world context. Another form of this tension is between assessment technologies developed by the state apparatus (a product of what Bernstein {2000} terms the "official recontextualising field") and assessment practices developed by expert writing exponents, teachers and teacher educators (the "pedagogic recontextualising field"). As Simon Gibbons and Bethan Marshall point out in their article, while efforts to reconceptualise the assessment of writing in English are not new, in recent years, high-stakes assessment of a top-down variety have been the norm in England. However, with the state appearing to relax its grip, there is (they argue) an opportunity for teachers (as their abstract says) "to reassert the importance of teacher assessment as the most reliable means of judging a student's abilities.

Their article reports on a recent project undertaken by NATE (the National Association for the Teaching of English) and the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM), which set out to trial a model for the collaborative standardised assessment of students' writing. Of interest to readers of this journal will be the generic marking guide that was developed and the kind of moderation procedures developed. While the project reported on was small scale, it did raise intriguing possibilities in respect of the potential for such an approach to be adopted in high-stakes, qualifications environments.

The title of John Gordon's article, "What is not said on hearing poetry in the classroom" is deliberately dual-pronged and provocative. In the first instance, it focuses attention on poetry as a *spoken* art form and suggests that speaking and listening are marginalised modes in relation to the teaching of poetry in classrooms. Secondly, drawing on Bernstein's theories, it argues that the current *pedagogic device,* which dictates what can be said and not said in classrooms, renders certain kinds of response to text invisible to teachers. Gordon refers to

> the requirements of examination response to poetry in writing, the framing of poetry in curricular detail as a print medium, and the more general recontextualisation of a literary jargon of poetry analysis to the school sphere, which in the UK sustains a metalanguage consistent with practical criticism...alongside the re-introduction of the unseen poetry paper.

Focusing on the response of one student ("Mark") to a *heard* poem by poet Liz Lockhead, Gordon draws attention to elements of meaning-making such as intonation and participation. In doing so, he makes a case for revisiting *how* we frame metalinguistic knowledge around responses to poetry so that particular kinds of response (Mark's) are not rendered invisible or suppressed in English classrooms.

The focus of Anthony Wilson's article is also poetry. Like Gordon, his starting point is also the current status of poetry in the school curriculum, with particular reference to the situation in England. In his case, however, the focus is on teachers' conceptualisations of poetry and pedagogy. This paper reports on the beliefs, attitudes and values revealed by a small-scale questionnaire survey of teachers (both primary and secondary), who were interested enough in the topic to engage in professional development around the teaching of poetry. Unsurprisingly, Wilson finds that there is a strong and persistent presence of a "personal growth" discourse among these

teachers, which sits with the power of various romantic conceptualisations of poetry and poetic composition. However, complicating the picture is an equally strong commitment to what might be termed a "rhetorical" drive in pedagogy, which puts the focus on the development of specific poetic techniques and reader-oriented strategies.

Melanie Shoffner, Luciana De Oliveira and Ryan Angus present as case studies, the efforts of two secondary English language arts teachers in the Midwestern United States (Helen and Scott) to expand the meaning of literacy in their own classrooms. The authors examine each teacher's understanding of literacy, their views on enacting literacy in the classroom and their efforts to engage students in multiliteracies. In doing so, they raise questions about what constitutes a multimodal approach to the teaching of English and the relationship between multimodality and multiliteracies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). They also tease out issues of classroom programming and implications for teacher education.

Teacher education is also the focus for Xenia Hadjioannou and Mary Hutchinson. Their article takes as its starting-point the significance of substantive and pedagogical content knowledge about language for teachers of English. They remind us of recent research signalling that secure grammatical knowledge and awareness enables teachers to support language development more effectively. However, it remains the case that in many Anglophone countries teachers lack confidence both in their own grammatical knowledge and in ways of handling the teaching of grammar in the classroom in purposeful ways. Hadjioannou and Hutchinson report on a pre-service programme designed to enable students to develop confidence in the meaningful use of grammar in the language classroom. They illustrate the mix of resentment, dismissal and fear with which students initially approach these classes and show the challenges that some students experienced in trying to plan creative and appropriate ways to address grammar from a functionally oriented perspective.

Jennifer Graff, and also Muhammed Kabilan and Fadzliyati Kamaruddin, both explore reading and how young people engage with literature. Graff, writing from within a US context, describes a course for teachers using literature from diverse cultures to stimulate discussion about immigrants' experiences, and how policy and practice frequently serves to disenfranchise and marginalise immigrants, "othering" their interests and identities. The article illustrates how perspectives presented through narrative become a powerful lens through which to engage with social realities because they allow "marginalized groups to offer authentic representations of themselves and their experiences and to showcase beliefs, perspectives, and experiences previously overshadowed by dominant communities." The discussions provoked by these alternative perspectives create a potentially dialogic space where new understandings are negotiated and re-negotiated and where "everything means, is understood, as part of a greater whole – there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 426). The article signals the transformative potential of narrative as a medium for personal and social change.

For Kabilan and Kamaruddin, the research problem is different. Their article addresses unmotivated readers in Malaysian schools, but the problem of engaging all learners meaningfully with the pleasure and the power of active reading is one that is familiar to all teachers of literature. They illustrate how the use of drama, specifically

Readers' Theatre, was trialled as an intervention to transform reluctance to interest with the goal of improving both motivation and learning. Readers' Theatre uses playscripts written from novels, which give readers the opportunity to adopt character roles and to read aloud with expression; they can be simply used as scripts for shared reading or can be used to stage dramatic performances. Kabilan and Kamaruddin describe how the staging of a performance by one teacher had a significantly positive impact upon students' perceptions of their learning and comprehension, and their interest in literature.

Finally, Jason Loh's classroom narrative provides a vignette of innovation and cultural resistance. He reflects upon his own experiences of teacher education and the advocacy of individual thinking rather than obedient compliance to pedagogic or theoretical norms. He uses this position to analyse critically his own experience of introducing an innovation. To an extent, what the innovation was is less important than the way it was received. After careful introduction to his colleagues, the Picture Word Inductive Model for developing vocabulary was adopted by many teachers in the school and, in general, favourably received. But when an external advisor, commissioned to support the implementation of government-prescribed literacy policy encountered it, the innovation was deemed to be disruptive of the national policy. Loh's narrative underlines emphatically the importance of professional autonomy and the power of critical reflection, which can enable teachers to make pedagogic decisions based on their observed understanding of learners' needs, even when these decisions challenge dominant policy discourses.

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