

## Book reviews

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The following titles are all published by the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University.

From the Teacher Resource Series edited by Geoff Brindley  
Manidis, M. and Prescott, P. (1994). *Assessing Oral Language Proficiency*.

Virgona, C. (1994). *Seeking Directions: Training Industry Trainers in a Multilingual Workforce*.

O'Grady, C. and Millen, M. (1994). *Finding Common Ground: Cross-cultural Communication Strategies for Job Seekers*.

From the Research Report Series, also edited by Brindley.

Jackson, E. (1994). *Non-language outcomes in the Adult Migrant English Program*.

Bottomley, Y., Dalton, J. and Corbel, C. (1994). *From Proficiency to Competencies: A Collaborative Approach to Curriculum Innovation*.

A separate, edited volume.

Burns, A. and Hood, S. (Eds) (1995). *Teachers' Voices: Exploring Course Design in a Changing Curriculum*.

The Australian National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research is the envy of New Zealanders who are interested in research into language. When they see the sort of publications that are coming from NCELTR, they will think longingly of the *Aotearoa* document's reference to "the establishment of a languages research institute to undertake research into language planning issues" (Waite, 1992:76). They may also remember an even earlier recommendation from Professor Kaplan (1980) that time should be made available for research and materials preparation into workplace language.

The six books reviewed here are a sample of NCELTR publications for the past couple of years. They range from the very practical (in the sense of providing materials which teachers can use with classes) to the more theoretical or descriptive. What they have in common, apart from their A4 format with soft covers in distinctive colours, is their basis in research into current practice. Most of them also include extensive references.

The Australian base of the books didn't seem to me to limit their usefulness to New Zealand readers. On the contrary, many of the curriculum innovations being described are about to make an impact here too. Admittedly there are many acronyms throughout, but failure to

recognise them all immediately wasn't too great a hurdle. In any case, some of the books add a glossary for those who haven't yet come to terms with ASLPR (Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings), DSP (Disadvantaged Schools Project) which, incidentally, has produced some classroom materials which New Zealand teachers have found valuable, and OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview).

The first book, "Assessing Oral Language Proficiency" is one of the resources for teachers in the Adult Migrant Education Programme (AMEP). It offers training in aspects of assessment that go beyond subjective judgements. The book should find a readership in New Zealand too, since the task of assessing oral language at the workplace level is going to become more than a voluntary task when the NZQA standards are in place. When parallel ESOL tests are being designed for New Zealand the information included here would be worth taking into account.

The authors start with explanations of various aspects of assessment. The general format combines information for teachers with materials ready to be used in classes of students in work-preparation courses. There are sections labelled "Reflections" after each part, and these seem suited to group discussion at the sessions where teachers are being introduced to the topic. By the time actual test samples are included, and student tapes attached, the readers (or course members) would be ready to bring their own judgement to the topic.

O'Grady and Millen, in their book of cross-cultural strategies for job seekers, address the problem of immigrants' first hurdle - the job interview. Building on studies of communication in multi-ethnic workplaces by people like Roberts, Davies and Jupp (1991), they move from general principles to very practical classroom materials. In one activity students have to sequence the steps in the script of a public service interview. Who would have thought there were so many moves? The trick is that students are invited to remove some of them as inappropriate. I mentally removed the one that said, "Applicant asks panel if they are tired after interviewing so many people.", although there are probably occasions when people do ask the question without losing "points".

Some of the material, such as the sequencing activity, is 'ready to go'; other sections leave it to the teacher to decide how the information will be presented. Occasionally the suggested discussion questions fall into the trap, noted frequently in teachers' classroom questions, of suggesting the answer 'no' simply by asking a question about it. For example, in one dialogue the applicant follows a long explanation by the interviewer with the query, "Come again?". The discussion question is, "Do you feel the applicant's attempt to clarify the question was appropriate?"

The next book, "Seeking Directions", is one step removed from the students. It is written to train people doing shop floor training in companies such as Ford Motor Vehicle Company, where this material was trialled. Broad philosophical questions are discussed in the first part of the book. Are



current training procedures genuinely participative and democratic or are they a new way of controlling workers?

For the next section the content is divided into "sessions", starting with the preliminary meeting for negotiating the curriculum, presumably within the parameters of the trainers' expertise. From here on the topics are presented in a variety of ways. Individual learning differences are explored via case studies, principles of adult learning are presented through graphics and reinforced through individually completed questionnaires.

A course is never fairly represented on paper. What counts in the success of "packages" like this is how they are organised and adapted for particular groups of participants. One assumes that readers would take the "Handout summarising Session 4" as the example it is intended to be, rather than a definitive statement about presentation skills. Nevertheless, some of the graphic material could be used regardless of context.

The author's career path is a familiar one, and similar to the lives of other authors in the series. She started by teaching English to immigrant workers and then moved on to working with personnel on matters relating to communication in workplaces where staff are from a variety of language backgrounds.

Two books from the Research Report Series, *Non-language outcomes in the Adult Migrant English Program* from New South Wales and *From Proficiency to Competencies: A Collaborative Approach to Curriculum Innovation* from Victoria, are based on programmes run by the AMEP and AMES respectively, a subtle distinction which is lost on the rest of the world and which doesn't matter for an appreciation of the book. These books offer less material which translates immediately into classroom lessons and proportionately more on the thinking behind the topics.

In Jackson's book eight major categories are offered as non-language outcomes of courses for adult ESOL students. Some are in the affective domain (confidence and motivation), some relate to new knowledge (social institutions) and others are in category eight, which could be the most tangible one for people wanting to establish themselves in a new society, "Access and entry into further study, employment, community life".

For readers who find it helpful to see tables illustrating how units of work break down into elements, which in turn lead to performance criteria, they are all here. If philosophising about the thinking behind them appeals more, then there is plenty of that too. Given the "increasing body of literature surrounding the emergent national vocational training agenda" (p.24), a book like this that links a number of sources with a commentary and tabulated information will save hours of reading for beginners in the field.

The basis for the case study described in the next book "From Proficiency to Competencies" was the introduction of the Certificate in

Spoken and Written English in all AMES Centres in Victoria during 1993. Teachers who had been accustomed to working towards proficiency now had to change their thinking and practice to a competency-based curriculum.

The "collaboration" in the subtitle refers to the relationship between management, principals, senior curriculum staff and, of course, teachers, during the process of changing from a system that appeared to allow for greater decision-making at the teacher end of the scale. As well as the value of the results for the participants, the record provides an interesting example of the process involved in leading teachers towards innovation. It also reflects the next stage in collective thinking about curriculum change and about assessment, topics well described already by the series editor, Geoff Brindley (1989, 1990).

The process is documented for the reader by a clearly set out description of the steps involved in which the authors make links between their experience and theories of course design and implementation. Questionnaire results are summarised in detail. I would recommend the book as much for its process as for its results. Any organisation seeking to implement quite radical curriculum changes could see this report as one way of recording and reflecting on those changes.

Finally, for those who are still interested in reading about how Australians have implemented their competency-based curriculum frameworks, there is the collection of articles by twelve writers in *Teachers' Voices: Exploring Course Design in a Changing Curriculum*. One of the interesting aspects of this collection is that the teacher-contributors, some of whom I heard speaking about the project at the ACTA/ATESOL National Conference in Sydney (January 1995), felt that they had contributed to events that went beyond their normal classroom responsibilities.

For example, Alison MacPhail from Queensland mentions the fun of involvement in a wider project and the fact that her views were appreciated. Annabelle Lukin disagrees with the contention of some teachers that the new Certificate in Spoken and Written English does away with the need for needs analysis. She speaks of the freedom she still had as the classroom teacher to collect current texts and attend to specific literacy needs. They all write in the first person, in a readable style with plenty of examples.

I predict that these last two volumes will have wide readership in New Zealand, as national curricula are developed to include ESOL teachers. There will be many parallels, on a smaller scale, with the stories from these Australian teachers. If NCELTR books continued to be published at the same annual rate, it could be a wise move for ESOL departments and individuals to subscribe to their publications catalogue.

## References

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by Koenraad Kuiper

University of Canterbury.

*Arboreal font for drawing tree diagrams on a Macintosh computer.*

Software house: Cascadilla Press, P.O. Box 440355, Somerville, MA

02144. e-mail: sales@cascadilla.com.

Price: US\$20, plus US\$4 for air mail shipping outside the US. Cascadilla accepts Visa and MasterCard. Shipping time is generally 7-10 days to New Zealand.

Arboreal font for Macintosh computers is a simple way to draw tree diagrams without having to acquire a graphics capability or even if you have used graphics or are using graphics to draw tree diagrams you may find Arboreal more to your liking. Since Arboreal is a font various keys on the keyboard will draw the lines and triangles you need to draw trees. The letters are done by using whatever font you prefer.

So how does Arboreal work? A variety of keys will draw single, binary or nary branches at a variety of angles. Take your pick. Other keys draw triangles, again of various inclinations. For dashed lines you use the upper case versions of the key.

For lines to indicate syntactic movements Arboreal has vertical lines with or without arrows, horizontal lines with or without crosses (to indicate in the case of the crosses that movement should not occur) and corners to link horizontal and vertical lines. Positioning of the lines is done by tabbing and the text characters can be pushed into place by using the spacebar. Since Arboreal is a font all the characters are able to be enlarged by changing to a larger point size.

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