

## **TESOL in Context Special Edition S2 ‘Pedagogies of Connection’**

### **Editorial**

**Kate Cadman, University of Adelaide, SA**

**Jenny Barnett, University of South Australia, SA**

**Cally Guerin, University of Adelaide, SA**

Welcome to the second Special Edition of *TESOL in Context*, which presents articles on the theme of ‘Pedagogies of Connection’ developed from the 2008 ACTA Inaugural International TESOL Conference held in Alice Springs in the heart of Australia in July 2008. It is our particular pleasure to bring together this unique collection of writing on this theme, and so to continue to illuminate the many and varied ways of ‘connecting’ through TESOL which were so resoundingly evident at the conference. The papers here explore how practising TESOL teachers in randomly different contexts see their own work as achieving ‘connections’, and ascribe real value to that aspect of the English language teaching they are engaged in. A shared understanding that emerged at the 2008 ACTA conference was that, in TESOL learning and teaching, relationships are the ground not the by-product of pedagogy. This belief is sustained throughout the papers in this issue. The articles here continue to reinforce the multiple ways in which we, as TESOL professionals, use curricula, activities, materials and teaching situations for the purposes of understanding and ‘connecting’ with others in positive, respectful and compassionate interactions, irrespective of the level or type of linguistic proficiency involved. The significance of learning and teaching relationships is foregrounded here as authors engage with their own first-hand experiences of ‘pedagogies of connection’.

The pedagogical connections evoked by the authors here involve a range of different parties in radically different settings: teacher-student connections, student-student connections, student-curriculum connections, curriculum-community connections, teacher-teacher connections, and finally, curriculum-context connections. Connections between English language teachers and students are a feature of most of the papers, but particularly so in two papers. The article by Lyn Bray explores the cultural dimensions of teaching English as a Foreign Language in a tertiary institution in rural Thailand and shows how the complex ‘insider/outsider’ space occupied by a foreign teacher, in between the worlds experienced by students of English, can foster new relationships through which learners can take ownership of the language they want to use and

negotiate new and more confident identities in English. Geoff Millar's account of researching the experiences of Chinese students for a staff development website adds another dimension by considering connections between English language learners and disciplinary specialists in a university.

The potential for student-student relationships is at the heart of several papers, which cross diverse student populations. Two of the authors focus on connections between English language learners and local students. Candy Gray shows how she used some key theoretical insights to develop activities specifically targeted to facilitate these students' comfortable and equitable interactions with each other, drawing the strong conclusion that "working collaboratively on a real issue has the potential to bond the students and break down the predominant 'us and them' attitude that exists" today in many educational forums. Erika von Aspern looks at increasing cultural understandings between local primary school children and their peers in the New Arrivals Centre on the same site. Through the process of collaboratively producing a hip-hop CD, students came together and were subsequently given the opportunity in focus groups to reflect on events, conditions and behaviours in the sessions, and to engage with their uncertainties and stereotypical thinking. Then, Sally Ashton-Hay writes about peer connections among English language learners as part of a chosen pedagogy. Developing a 'stages of learning matrix', in her research she compares case studies in an Australian and a Turkish university where ESL and EFL learners, respectively, engaged in interactive peer-based learning programs to collaborate on authentic communicative activities.

Student-curriculum connections are the main focus of three papers. Jenny Barnett and Rosie Antenucci explore the complexity of the learning challenges faced by newly arrived immigrant and refugee children. They especially highlight the importance of teachers fostering "participation" as a central curriculum concept, by creating environments that recognise the existing cultural understandings that learners bring, and engaging in reciprocal dialogues that acknowledge and connect with new arrivals as whole people. Then, raising the stimulating question, 'Books and reading: tools or toys?', Kathleen Rushton considers Indigenous students' participation in the reading curriculum, and also highlights the close relationship between curriculum and community in Indigenous contexts. The article persuasively establishes the significance for these children of reading materials developed by their own communities from relevant language and content. The third paper in this group, by Shu-Hui Yu and Kate Cadman, links students, curriculum and academic community in an EFL tertiary public speaking

course, and analyses how these students conceptualise making connections with the task and with their audience when they structure their oral presentations in English.

Teacher-teacher connections are central to the professional development processes explored by Anna Franca Plastina in her paper describing the creation of a virtual community of practice for EFL teachers working in isolation, which allowed for collaborative learning processes leading to innovative teaching practices. Karen Stacey also focuses on relationships among educators in her description of a professional development program run for bilingual tutors working in New Zealand classrooms, reporting on the value of bringing these tutors together in order to establish connections between them as they learn from each other's knowledge and experience. Finally, the paper by Jeffrey Gil and Robyn Najar continues the connections between curriculum and context, arguing that teachers have a professional responsibility to take careful account of cultural contexts of learning when deciding on pedagogies, rather than imposing a method that may have been effective in one context but may be quite inappropriate in another – even ecologically damaging.

Thus we can see the myriad ways in which 'pedagogies of connection' are being created and practised across Australia, and across the world. As Editors we'd like to hope that this *TIC* special issue might inspire others engaged in TESOL and TEFL to explore how their own work is refracted through the lens of 'connection', and to engage with the ideas and practices described in the papers here. We'd like to express our sincere appreciation for the connections we've made ourselves through this editing process, with the authors, with the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), and, above all, with the members of the Editorial Committee for this edition for their generous and informed feedback on draft papers. Our particular thanks go to:

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