



2020 President's Report

My report summarises our achievements over the last year or so in relation to ACTA's core objectives of promoting TESOL teaching and learning, policy advocacy, developing professional partnerships and developing the association.

Promoting TESOL teaching and learning

TESOL in Context

The last two years has seen *TESOL in Context* fully transitioned to an online journal thanks to the efforts of the TiC Working Group then convened by Shem Macdonald. In July, 2018, ACTA employed Carly Minett to manage processes of submission and review, online platform publication and journal communications. Since her appointment as Journal Coordinator, organisational processes of the journal have been strengthened by the creation of two editorial teams; the streamlining of manuscript submission and review processes; detailed reports to Council of progress, including reports on TiC usage data, and a review and refresh of the TiC Editorial Board for 2019-2022. The journal is now widely promoted through social media and the ACTA website, and state and territory association newsletters. Further journal promotion is planned such as automatic TiC publication email notifications to ACTA councillors and promotion of former articles from the Informit site.

Carly and the editorial teams have worked hard publishing new issues while maintaining the high standards of the journal. A themed TiC issue, Ethics and TESOL, was published in December 2018. A further issue based on ACTA/SATEOL Conference presentations focusing on multilingualism was published in December 2019. Two themed publications are planned for this year: a major mid-year Indigenous issue and another focusing on the theory-practice nexus in the classroom. Many thanks to working group members and past and present editorial teams; Shem Macdonald, Anne Keary, Rod Nielson, Ruth Arber, Michiko Weinmann and Journal Coordinator, Carly Minett, who have made this progress possible. We look forward to future issues of the journal.

Victorian English as an Additional Language (EAL) Curriculum

Following concerns expressed by ACTA and others to a draft Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) EAL Curriculum consultation document, a special VCAA consultation forum, chaired by Professor Joe lo Bianco, was held with key stakeholders on 7 December 2018. As a result of the forum, VCAA engaged a specialist team comprising Professor Chris Davison, Dr Alan Williams and myself to further develop the document. After extensive feedback on consultation drafts, a new F-10 English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum was released in March 2019 allowing further teacher trialling and feedback on the new curriculum until September 2019. A final version of the curriculum was released in October 2019 for implementation in 2020. This year, the Department of Education and Training Victoria and VicTESOL have been providing teacher professional support for full implementation.

The new curriculum provides three learning pathways for the diverse range of EAL learners in Victorian schools, with the appropriate pathway determined by a range of factors, including prior learning. It connects EAL progression to both the English curriculum and the curriculum in other learning areas. Rather than being a 'companion' to the English curriculum, however, the EAL Curriculum presents EAL study as a curriculum domain in its own right. The curriculum has met with strong support from teachers and teacher educators, in particular for its emphasis on plurilingualism and language across the curriculum.

ACTA QATESOL 2020 Conference

Organisation of the 2020 Brisbane ACTA/QATESOL conference, *Pushing the Boundaries*, has been well advanced. ACTA allocated conference seed funding and the QATESOL conference planning group secured the conference venue, keynote speakers and recently called for papers relating to its five program streams: New developments in TESOL pedagogy and applied linguistics; Student support and wellbeing; Global world Englishes and Indigenous students and Systems, structures policies impacting on TESOL. In the last few weeks, however, the spreading COVID 19 pandemic has necessitated a major change of plans. ACTA executive and QATESOL have agreed to seek a postponement of this year's Conference to 2021 and the conference venue has agreed to reschedule. Many thanks to QATESOL President, Gae Nastasi, and Sharon and Larain from the conference planning group, for their dedication and agility in organising this major event on ACTA's professional development calendar. We look forward to meeting colleagues again at the conference in 2021.

Policy advocacy

Submissions to Government

EAL/D and AMEP have continued to be a major focus of ACTA's advocacy this year.

Review of the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* provided an opportunity to shape an EAL/D inclusive national policy framework for schools for the next decade. I attended a review consultation and prepared ACTA's submission for the Review Secretariat (June 2019). The submission argued for national recognition of EAL/D learners as a priority equity cohort in the revised Declaration in view of the major changes that have occurred nationally in EAL/D education since the 2008 Declaration. It drew on previous EAL/D advocacy work to provide a comprehensive outline of the national policy context (and policy vacuum) affecting EAL/D education during that time. The final *Alice Springs Education Declaration*, however, failed to recognise the English learning needs of EAL/D learners. Biennial national stakeholder forums evaluating progress against the declaration goals may provide an avenue for further ACTA advocacy on EAL/D in schools.

The Government's *Review of the AMEP business model* prompted a further round of ACTA advocacy on the AMEP. Helen conducted a comprehensive survey of AMEP and SEE teachers (Jan 2019) which communicated teacher voices and provided a valuable evidence base for ACTA submissions on the AMEP, the Social Compass evaluation of the AMEP, and ACTA's submission to the Government's review of the vocational education and training system. Helen convened AMEP teacher consultation forums in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (March, April) gaining valuable grass roots feedback for the Social Compass evaluation. Helen followed up with ACTA submissions to Evaluation of the AMEP new business model (April 2019), Relocation of AMEP to Home Affairs (June 2019), and subsequent responses to the Shergold Report recommendations relating to the AMEP.

This work also informed ACTA's submissions to other Government inquiries, namely Review of Vocational Education and Training (Jan 2019), Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test) Bill (August 2019) and Productivity Commission *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* (Sept 2019). We can't help but wonder where Helen gets the stamina to maintain the pace and pressure on this important policy agenda.

Senate Estimates Questions on Notice

Over the last three years, Federal Parliament's Senate Estimates process has provided a key avenue for gaining Government responses to questions on key policy issues of concern to ACTA. Over this period the Australian Greens have submitted scores of Questions on Notice in relation to EAL/D in schools while Federal Labor has submitted scores of Questions on Notice in relation to AMEP issues.

Government responses to EAL/D questions cover issues of the National Framework for Assessing English Language Proficiency, the low English proficiency funding formula, levels and accountability for students with English language proficiency needs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with low English language proficiency, overseas students in schools, Syrian and Iraqi humanitarian crisis funding, the Gonski and Melbourne Declaration reviews and AITSL Professional Standards. Government responses to AMEP questions cover issues of new AMEP business model, AMEP contracts, teacher workloads, data management, assessment and curriculum and the Social Compass Evaluation and Shergold review reports.

These answers, all published on the Senate website, crucially inform further ACTA advocacy and help hold Government accountable for the transparency and adequacy of national policies affecting English language provision in the school and adult sectors.

Policy consultation and representation

Some months before the election, I established policy dialogue with Australian Greens Education Spokesperson, Senator Mehreen Faruqi around ACTA's *National Strategy for Language in Education and Training*. Following collaboration with her policy advisor and endorsement by the party room, the Greens adopted four English language provision actions from the strategy as the Greens education policy plan to ensure everyone has access to English language support. This plan, which can be found on the Greens website, provides sustained national political commitment to equity of English language provision. It includes actions to review the AMEP, implement national English language proficiency assessment, develop effective post-school education and training pathways for migrant and refugee youth, all supported by a dedicated national coordination unit. Since establishing links with the Greens, Senator Faruqi has ensured regular submission of Senate Estimates Questions on Notice on EAL/D issues identified by ACTA.

Since the 2016 federal election, ACTA has attempted to engage Federal Labor in policy responses to long-standing EAL/D issues. In the year prior to the May 2019 election, Michael worked with Tanya Plibersek's office to detail ACTA concerns and explore policy solutions. From this process, two key policy documents were developed and submitted: feedback on Labor's draft National Platform and a submission to Labor, ACTA's *National Strategy for Language in Education and Training*. Regrettably, this work had no impact on the policies Labor took to the May 2019 election.

Since the 2019 election, ACTA has managed to re-establish communication with Labor via the office of David Smith, Chair of Labor's Education Caucus Committee and has recently opened up direct dialogue with Andrew Giles, Labor Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Shadow Minister Assisting for Immigration and Citizenship and Chair of Labor's Multicultural Engagement Taskforce

with a view to informing Labor's new policy platform for multicultural affairs. Helen and I had a preparatory zoom meeting with Andrew Giles' policy advisor in March. A policy roundtable consultation on EAL/D and AMEP education issues and solutions is scheduled with Andrew Giles for 9 April with further zoom meetings to follow.

All the above activity has been supported by correspondence to relevant Ministers and authorities, and ongoing personal liaison by Helen and myself with department officials and Government and Opposition policy staffers - all with the objective of breaking through the seemingly impermeable membrane of the 'Canberra bubble'!

Concrete AMEP and EAL/D policy outcomes from the advocacy effort invested still remain to be seen. ACTA's direct and indirect influence in relation to the *National Framework for Assessing English Language proficiency* may be bearing fruit. The project remains on the national agenda and ACARA is committed to further work on the framework. A recent ACARA national workshop on developing the framework was attended by all state and territory EAL/D managers and data officers and further work on the framework received strong support from this group.

Developing Professional Partnerships

Since the EAL/D Managers forum at the ACTA/SATESOL conference, ACTA has maintained contact with this group and kept them updated on policy developments on the ACTA *National Strategy for Language in Education and Training* and our submission to Melbourne Declaration submission. This relationship with department officers should continue and the policy partnership could be further developed through promoting wider access to Senate Estimates responses. Through the three ACTA AMEP forums which Helen conducted last year in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, an effective network of AMEP practitioners has been created which could be further developed.

National policy partnerships

ACTA has continued its membership of the Australian Alliance of Associations in Education (AAAE) and represented its views at its Sydney and Melbourne meetings. In this last year, we have also established partnerships with two other national advocacy associations; the Multicultural Youth Action Network (MYAN), who have a strong track record of advocacy with Government on migrant and refugee youth issues, and the recently formed National Education Roundtable Steering Group, chaired by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. Through the Steering Group, ACTA is contributing to the development of a policy paper which will outline state and territory policy and planning contexts, and identify gaps, research and policy advocacy relating to the education and well-being of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. ACTA has also been invited to join a new literacy advocacy group, the Foundation for Literacy and Learning, and has provided input to its Touchstone document to ensure language inclusive perspective to literacy learning in the early years and beyond.

Developing the Association

ACTA Council and Executive

Thanks to Shem and Lesley's initial support, Zoom Web conferences have become an automatic and effective platform for ACTA Council and executive meetings. State and territory associations are increasingly accessing the facility for their own meetings. Its value to ACTA is underscored in the current COVID-19 environment.

ACTA website

Over the last year, Lesley has led a refresh of the ACTA website with the support of the Communications Working Group. A website development company, *Swish Design*, was engaged to redesign and host the website. The new website went live this year on 31 January. Thanks to Lesley, we are now moving to a self-sustaining website management phase with training support by Lesley.

ACTA working groups

ACTA working groups are functioning well as self-managing groups with convenor facilitation and support. Over the last year, they have been refreshed and new ones established to meet additional priorities. Some convenor changes include Margaret Corrigan for the Adult TESOL working group, Sophia Sabatier and Lesley Ciocarelli for the Communications and Social Media group, and Carly Minett for the TESOL in Context working group, with editorial team reps and new members, Jennifer Mayers and Greg Restall. Newly formed working groups are the Membership working group convened by Jennifer Mayers, the Indigenous Education working group convened by Fran Murray and the Early Years Learning group convened by Margaret Turnbull. Each of these groups are engines and sounding boards for deliberation and proposals to Council and play a vital role in ACTA's policy and organisational development.

Final comments

I believe ACTA as a national body representing the professional interests of TESOL educators is in good shape. In the last year or so, our national voice has become clearer and stronger, and our ability to navigate the political system wiser while our organisational processes have become more effective. We have been able to achieve these things because of Council and Executive members' collaboration and commitment to our shared professional goals.

As I step down after a personally rewarding five years as president, I reflect on how fortunate and privileged I have been working with Executive and Council members over that time. In particular, Adriano, Shem, Margaret, Helen, Jennifer, Lesley, Fran, Carly, Gae and Julia, you all have my thanks and admiration for the contribution you have made to the association in the roles you have so ably filled and the support you have given.

COVID-19 now changes everything. It forces us all to reconsider priorities of personal and family safety, survival and wellbeing and re-evaluate our commitment to activities outside this sphere. In the public policy arena, it means a slow-down, if not a deep freeze, in our area of advocacy for a period. This time provides an opportunity for ACTA to consolidate our achievements and possibly innovate and upscale forms of online professional interaction during the pandemic and in preparation for a post COVID-19 world. Hopefully, this world will be one that places a renewed value on the social and civic, on productive equity rather than financial austerity and provides a more propitious environment for our future advocacy.



Michael Michell

President, ACTA

2 April 2020