

## 2 Learning to play the ‘classroom tennis’ well: IELTS and international students in teacher education

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This study addresses the question of an appropriate IELTS score for graduate entry teacher education courses by investigating the extent to which current IELTS scores into graduate entry teacher education courses are considered adequate: by the lecturers of such students, by prospective teacher registration authorities and by the students themselves.

### ABSTRACT

Teacher education students whose language background is not English (LBOTE) not only need to perform adequately in English for the purposes of their academic study, but also need to be fluent in the public situation of teaching their own classes on practicum and in their future careers. Thus, for these students, the ‘public performance’ of English adds a significant layer of issues to those applying to other cohorts of LBOTE students.

This research sets out to address the question of an appropriate IELTS score for graduate entry teacher education courses through investigating: the extent to which current IELTS scores into graduate entry teacher education courses are considered adequate by the lecturers of such students, by prospective teacher registration authorities and by the students themselves, and, following this, what an appropriate score might be for entry into such courses. Academics from four Faculties of Education and one student cohort were interviewed, along with representatives of one state teacher registration authority. A range of language skills for teachers were identified. A key issue for these students in such courses is the potential for language growth in the course itself with a corresponding need to focus on exit abilities as well as entry ability. It is argued therefore on the one hand, that in short graduate entry courses, universities ought to consider setting an entry level corresponding to the requirements of the teacher registration authority. Some interviewees argued, however, that the complex of issues faced by these students – such as familiarisation with Anglophone schooling cultures – makes particularly high IELTS entry scores a distraction from these larger issues. There is also a need for universities to value the experiences and funds of knowledge brought by LBOTE students. Ultimately, IELTS entry scores are a function of a Faculty’s ability to provide language support. The nature of such support and of a richer approach to testing is discussed.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In 2007, 17.3% of the student population in Australian universities were international students, with the top five source countries each Asian (IDP, 2007). These students have a number of adjustment issues in the Anglophone university environment (Deumert *et al*, 2005). Such students enter a complex environment of not only a foreign language, but a foreign language in an academic register (Canagarajah, 2002). IELTS assesses the listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities in English of potential Language Background other than English (LBOTE) students. In this paper, we use the acronym LBOTE to describe the language background of these students, unless quoting literature which refers to them in some other way, such as Non-English Speaking Background (NESB).

A useful brief history of the IELTS testing system and selected associated research is contained in Hyatt and Brooks (2009, p 21). IELTS provides tertiary institutions with data about potential (LBOTE) students' English proficiency at a point in time. Universities use cut-off scores as an indication of a threshold level below which students are deemed unlikely to cope with the language demands of university-level study. Thus, setting threshold scores is intended to minimise the extent to which English language ability inhibits performance (especially early) in a course. Bayliss and Ingram (2006, p 1) describe the 'meaning' of an IELTS score for tertiary study as follows:

“... the score a student achieves in an IELTS test is meant to indicate whether he/she has a sufficient level of English proficiency to cope with the linguistic demands of tertiary studies, (but) it does not imply that they will succeed academically or that they will not struggle linguistically”

A similar meaning is ascribed by O'Loughlin and Arkoudis (2009, p 100):

“...it predicts the extent to which a candidate will be able to begin studying through the medium of English”

It is important to remember that categories such as 'LBOTE students' or 'international students' describe heterogeneous populations, 'from diverse cultural, economic, social and linguistic backgrounds... (that) cannot unproblematically be characterised as (all) having (the same) qualities' (Ryan and Viete, 2009, p 304). Thus, terms such as 'South Asians' disguise an immense diversity between educational cultures, intellectual heritages and students' learning experiences.

Teacher education students whose language background is not English and, in the case of graduate entry teacher education students who completed undergraduate degrees in cultures where English is not the majority language, provide a distinct sub-cohort of this category. These students not only need to perform adequately in English for the purposes of their academic study, but also need to be fluent in the public situation of teaching their own classes on practicum and in their future careers (to 'perform' in a different sense), while learning about the cultures of Anglophone schooling. There are also written abilities required of teachers that differ from academic work, such as preparing comprehensible written materials in English, and marking school pupils' work in English. Thus, for teacher education students, the 'public performance' of English adds a significant layer of issues to those applying to other cohorts of students subject to IELTS testing. Han (2006) has shown that Australia also confronts such students with unfamiliar pedagogies that in their turn produce certain dominant, contradictory or competing elements that make the task of identity transformation a challenge for such students – in our terms as public 'performers' of English. In addition, in Australia, teacher accreditation authorities require particular levels of language achievement (see Table 4 below). In the state of New South Wales the main employer - the NSW Department of Education and Training - has developed its own instrument aimed at testing language skills specific to teaching: the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT). It is worth noting that in Australia, certain

areas of school education – such as secondary Mathematics and Science – are increasingly heavily populated by LBOTE teachers.

This research investigates the question of an appropriate score for graduate entry teacher education courses. Through interviewing relevant personnel in universities and teacher registration authorities, the research addresses:

- 1 the extent to which current IELTS scores into graduate entry teacher education courses are considered adequate by the lecturers of such students, by prospective teacher registration authorities and by the students themselves
- 2 what an appropriate score might be for entry into such courses.

The research recognises that operating in Anglophone schooling cultures is not just a question of language difficulties for LBOTE students. The notion of ‘communicative competence’ is complex for teacher education students – including not only the ability to comprehend and communicate academic course material and to function effectively in learning situations such as tutorials, but also to comprehend and ‘perform’ English as teachers themselves, operating in front of school pupils who themselves may represent a diversity of cultural and linguistic experience – and all of this within a schooling culture that may be quite removed from their own schooling experience. The outcomes of this research are recommendations about appropriate IELTS scores for entry into teacher education in the context of other factors impacting on the success of these students.

The particular cohorts selected for investigation are those in graduate-entry pre-service courses in secondary education, such as a Graduate Diploma or Masters degree. The phrase ‘LBOTE students’ as used here, then, refers to students who have completed an initial degree in a country in which the majority language is not English. Some of these are ‘international students’, though many are also Permanent Residents or are Australian citizens. ‘International students’ is a term usually used to refer to overseas students on student visas. Many of the students to whom we refer here are not on student visas, but are, rather, Permanent Residents or Australian citizens. They have all, however, undertaken earlier education in countries in which English was not the majority language, and hence have been subject to IELTS testing in order to be accepted into their graduate entry courses in teacher education. In general usage, ‘LBOTE’ may still include those who have been schooled in Anglophone countries like Australia. However, we are specifically using the acronym ‘LBOTE’ here to refer to students who were subject to IELTS or similar testing before undertaking their graduate entry course. This includes both those who have undertaken earlier education in countries in which English was not the majority language and, when relevant, international students. Some of those on student visas intend to teach in their home countries; most of the total group under consideration will teach in Australia. All are educated on the assumption that they will teach in Australian schools. In this report we use the terms ‘student’ or ‘student-teachers’ to describe this group of teacher education students. The word ‘pupil’ is used to refer to school children. We also use the term ‘Faculty’ to describe ‘Faculties’ and ‘Schools’ of Education in universities, in order to distinguish these from primary and secondary schools.

## **2 LBOTE STUDENTS, ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY, TESTING INSTRUMENTS AND TEACHER EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

At the time of writing, international education is Australia’s third largest export after coal and iron ore (Bradley, 2008, p 88). Over 80% of international students come from Asia, including 21% from mainland China (Bradley, 2008, p 92). The Bradley review of Australian higher education links global engagement with international education, global research networks and student mobility because Australia has the ‘highest proportion of international students in higher education in the OECD’ (Bradley 2008, p 12).

Australian higher education is seen as facing a risk because 'international students are concentrated in a narrow range of subject fields' (Bradley, 2008, p 12). There is pressure to broaden the fields and levels of studies being undertaken by international students. 67% of the Chinese student cohort of 58588 students in 2007 were undertaking degrees in management and commerce disciplines, while 'only 3.6% (were) undertaking a research higher degree' (Bradley, 2008, pp 92, 93). In terms of research higher degrees, compared with other OECD countries, a 'relatively low proportion of Australia's higher degree students are international students' (Bradley, 2008, p 12). Significantly, it is argued that Australian 'immigration policies that target international students and scholars can yield positive results and can be critical in building the necessary skilled workforce for the future' (Bradley, 2008, p 99). In order to fill labour shortages and skills mismatches, international students are expected 'to become work ready in the Australian context' (Bradley, 2008, p 103). In particular, Bradley (2008, p12) argues that because of 'looming shortages of academic staff (in Australia) it is time to consider how increases in higher degree enrolments from high-performing international students might be encouraged.' From these combined perspectives it is, therefore, 'essential for Australian (higher education) institutions to maintain high standards and excellent student support services to maintain (international) student numbers' (Bradley, 2008, p 107). The following review delineates the key debates and concepts concerning English language testing and tertiary students in general and teacher education students in particular, with particular emphasis on the Australian context.

## 2.1 International students in English language universities

Over a decade ago, Barrett-Lennard (1997) reported that international students in Australia were not receiving the support needed for successful university study. These students needed help in preparing for IELTS and also with learning at Australian universities. Academic courses that addressed both needs were recommended. Krause *et al* (2005) investigated the changes over a 10 year period in the experiences of first year students in Australian universities. They found that international students were less satisfied that their expectations had been met than were their domestic counterparts. Likewise, the analysis of the first year experiences of students from equity groups revealed sufficient subgroup differences to warrant institutional strategies designed to meet their specific needs.

Ramsay *et al*'s (2007) study of first year students in an Australian university included comparisons of young (17–21 year olds), mature-aged, local and international students. While there was no significant difference between young and mature-aged students, local students rated their level of adjustment significantly higher than international students. The results of Ramsay *et al*'s (2007) study indicate that the design of first year programs for all first year university students, and some categories of first year students in particular, need much more careful consideration by universities. They recommend an 'intercultural training approach which focuses on general or culture specific critical incidents and involves the rehearsal of responses to potentially novel and complex situations in order to decrease stress and enhance coping within the particular context. Such (learning) activities could include both local and international students to try to facilitate links between the groups' (Ramsay *et al*, 2007, p 261).

Zhou *et al* (2008) report that a learning skills model has been advocated since the mid-1980s in response to the increasing presence of international students in British higher education. Training is seen as necessary for international students to acquire education-culture-specific skills that are required to engage in new learning. They point to practical guidelines for educational interventions to prepare, orientate and skill international students, for instance in areas relating to knowledge of the education culture, communicative competence, pedagogical engagement with local students, and building knowledge networks. With the increasing recruitment of overseas students by British higher education institutions, there has been a growing need to understand the process of students' intercultural adaptation and the approaches that can be adopted by these institutions in order to facilitate and support these students' learning experiences. Gill (2007) suggests that a common



assumption in British educational institutions and among academics is that overseas students are 'problematic' and 'demanding'. Gill (2007) undertook a year long in-depth qualitative investigation of the experiences of a small cohort of Chinese postgraduate students (N=10) in a British university. The investigation explored a three-fold 'stress-adaptation-growth' intercultural learning process for these participants by focusing on the discussions of their lived experience in the UK. It focused partly on their capabilities for engaging in critical reflection and stimulating their access to both Chinese and Western intellectual resources. The outcomes of this transformative intercultural learning included the students' ready accommodation of 'otherness' and adoption of constructive, tolerant, flexible and critical attitudes. Significantly, Gill's (2007) study indicates that British higher education institutions would do well to formalise academic credit-bearing studies in transformative intercultural learning to better ensure that these students acquire the skills and employ strategies to enable them to be successful in their studies.

Weisz and Nicolettou (2004) reported on the experiences of 70 students from China who articulated into various Australian university Business degrees. It was found that their English language proficiency as measured by the IELTS score was insufficient to meet their study requirements, despite having gained university entry. In order to build the students' English language skills, and to support their entry into mainstream classes by their second semester, an intensive teaching program in English language followed by discipline studies helped these students meet the academic challenges of their study programs. The students studying intensively achieved higher average marks in five out of seven subjects compared with the general student cohort who had completed the same subjects over 13 weeks. It was also found that English language proficiency was only weakly correlated to academic success in two subjects. Indications were that small class sizes and specially designed support programs assisted students to overcome English language limitations.

Skyrme (2007) analysed the experiences of two international students from China beginning studies in a New Zealand university. The focus was on their negotiation of a single course and its assessment requirements. Neither student passed the course. However, one student did develop his English language reading skills, deepen his understanding of the course and improve his competence. The other student's previous successful learning practices proved to be ineffective, and the advice he received unhelpful. Large first-year classes provided no small group interactions with teaching staff, which seems to have hindered the recognition and adoption of suitable learning strategies. Skyrme (2007) recommended:

- better preparation for the practices demanded within the university;
- entry requirements addressing more than just English language proficiency;
- universities making provision in academic workloads for greater teacher guidance within first-year courses.

Ryan and Viete (2009, p 304), however, have a quite different perspective on the issue of international students in Australian higher education. They point to contradictions in the internationalisation of Australian higher education in which pedagogies emphasise the 'one-way flow of knowledge from teachers to students ... (Whereby) Western knowledge is legitimised as international in focus, yet there is no indication that the focus is developing through genuine intercultural dialogue'. Learning by international students 'is expected to conform to seemingly immutable and often implicit norms laid down by the (Western, English language) academy' (Ryan and Viete, 2009, p 304). They report that those operating within this pedagogical framework construct international students as 'deficient' and advocate 'remedial' approaches in the areas of academic literacy and English language skills. The debate thus focuses on blaming the problem on the English-language proficiency of international students. However, Ryan and Viete (2009, p 306) argue that this position misrecognises the problem, noting that although international students 'will have been screened by an International English



Language Testing System (IELTS) exam and are assumed to have adequate language proficiency to participate in their new learning environments, due to the disjuncture between the test and the demands of disciplinary discourses within the university, these may in fact not be a good indicator of their ability to operate within the language of Anglophone academia. ... English-language study ... may not equip them well for the discipline-specific and often fast-paced language in lectures or tutorials, which is saturated with unfamiliar local knowledge, pronunciation and mores of dialogic exchange'. Though it is logical and necessary for English-speaking Western academies to establish entry level English language requirements at an appropriate threshold, Ryan and Viete (2009, p 306) explain that the language proficiency threshold does not protect students against the complexity of academic reading and writing tasks and the cognitive overload students experience in their new learning environment. According to Ryan and Viete (2009, p 309), local Anglophone students prefer to form study groups separate from international and immigrant students, and do not listen adequately to LBOTE students. Likewise, lecturers often do not invite LBOTE students to present knowledge to enrich understandings of topics under discussion. Ryan and Viete contend that lecturers have not learnt to create pedagogies that give international students a sense of security in mixing with locals and growing an expectation that their opinions and knowledge will be valued. International students present opportunities for engaging different educational culture, intellectual heritages and transnational knowledge networks. However, Ryan and Viete (2009, p 304) point to the absence of reciprocity or mutuality in learning across intellectual cultures and to the absence of value being given to international students' knowledge. International students find that 'their own knowledge, linguistically mediated as it is in another language, is seen as being of lesser value' (Ryan and Viete, 2009, p 307) They are concerned with how students are taught to deal with academic tasks which are new to them and which are often tacitly understood by academics in English-speaking Western academies. The issue is less a matter of LBOTE students' general language proficiency than of supporting them in learning the target academic discourse. For O'Loughlin and Arkoudis (2009), this is a matter of gaining legitimacy within their disciplinary community of practice, which they find as particularly related to speaking.

## 2.2 Perceptions of IELTS testing

Coleman *et al* (2003) undertook a study of student and staff perceptions of IELTS in Australian, UK and Chinese institutions. Staff and students were surveyed with respect to: their knowledge, perceptions and attitudes; beliefs about the predictive value of IELTS with regard to university demands; the appropriateness of entry levels, and awareness of unprincipled activities. Overall, Coleman *et al* found that the respondents perceived the IELTS Test to have high validity, with students generally satisfied with the entry scores used by their institution. However, they found that staff wished to increase their institution's minimum IELTS entry score because they were less satisfied with the English language abilities of international students.

Brown and Taylor's (2006) survey of examiners on the revised IELTS Speaking Test reported approval of its interview format and assessment criteria. The examiners' main worries were about the use of prompts, the wording of the ranking scales, assessment of pronunciation and rehearsed speech, as well as concerns about topic familiarity and the appropriateness and equivalence of topics.

O'Loughlin (2008) studied the place of IELTS in the selection process of an Australian university by exploring the perceptions that administrative and academic staff and students had about the test. The central research question was: 'To what extent are IELTS test scores used in valid and ethical ways for the purpose of university selection?' (O'Loughlin, 2008, p 150). Among O'Loughlin's key findings, two are relevant to this study. First, the evidence pointed to the prevalence of 'folkloric' beliefs among university staff about English language proficiency and the IELTS Test. Some of these beliefs had a firmer basis in research evidence than others. Such beliefs included scepticism about the validity, reliability and 'trustworthiness' of IELTS scores in terms of their power to predict academic

success (as O'Loughlin notes, an unrealistic expectation). Second, there was a lack of clearly established equivalence between the IELTS Test and other acceptable evidence of English proficiency in university selection policy. O'Loughlin contrasted the selection process of this Australian university with that used at a British university:

“the selection of postgraduate international students at Lancaster University...is radically different to the one described here. There the selection of international students is a complex, holistic decision-making process primarily based on the ‘subjective’ recommendation of an informed academic staff to the University's senior postgraduate admissions officer. The range of criteria taken into account is extremely rich, including the applicant's academic background, intellectual capacity, evidence of English language proficiency (IELTS or other recognised measure), work experience, the applicant's own argued case for selection, reports from academic and work referees, personal characteristics (such as motivation, age and adaptability) and, in some instances, a follow-up telephone interview.....Other factors influencing their decisions include the offer-acceptance ratio, recommendations from other academic colleagues, the reports of agents and scholarship agencies” (p 182).

### 2.3 The language sub-skills

Elder and O'Loughlin (2003) investigated the connection between intensive English language study and gains on the band score on IELTS. They studied the progress of 112 LBOTE students enrolled in intensive English language courses at four different language centres in Australia and New Zealand. They gauged students' progress in terms of score gains in the academic module of the IELTS, which was administered at the beginning and end of a 10-12 week period of intensive English language instruction. Pre- and post-study questionnaires were administered to all participating students and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 students sampled according to their level of gain at the post-test session. Interviews were conducted with administrators and teachers at each of the participating institutions in order to elicit information about the learning environment and the factors they saw as significant in influencing the English language progress of the students. Students made variable progress in English during the three month period with an average gain of about half a band overall.

Rogers (2004) reported that research over the past three decades had shown that repeated exposure to different accents measurably improves comprehension of them. This suggests that materials used in preparing international students from Asia for university study abroad might introduce them to the range of English accents that they are likely to encounter overseas. By incorporating such materials into pre-tertiary teaching, students can be exposed to a range of accents and be better prepared. Rogers argued that because New Zealand universities accept the IELTS Test as a valid measure of students' ability to cope with university demands, that IELTS preparation materials might include both native and non-native accents in their listening exercises.

Carpenter (2005), in reviewing previous studies, particularly highlighted NESB students' difficulties in understanding the content and intent of their lectures, difficulties in understanding everyday language and problems with oral language comprehension and competence.

Moore and Morton (2005) analysed the type of writing required in the two domains of university study and the IELTS test. They compared the standard IELTS Task 2 rubric with a corpus of 155 assignment tasks collected at two Australian universities. They found that whilst IELTS writing bears some similarity with the genre of the university essay, there are also significant differences. Their findings suggest that the type of writing IELTS elicits seems to have more in common with certain public non-academic genres, rather than testing what is thought of as appropriate models for university writing.

Mayor's (2006) research indicates that there are recurrent features in the writing of candidates from Chinese language backgrounds under IELTS test conditions. These include a high level of interpersonal reference, combined with a heavily dialogic and hortatory style. Chinese candidates in Mayor's study used more interrogatives and imperatives than a similar sample of Greek candidates, along with grammatical devices which call for a response on the part of the reader or others. These features gave a polemical tone to the English-medium writing of these Chinese candidates. Mayor argues that it is important to recognise that some Chinese students who performed well in the Chinese education system may import into their English writing a range of practices valued in China, but which may have a negative affect on their scores. For Chinese students to succeed in English-medium universities they need to learn, and to be taught, the models of writing expected of students in those institutions.

Mahdavy (2008) argues that TOEFL and IELTS listening tests differ with respect to their history, theoretical basis, research support and form, leading to suggestions that IELTS is more content-based, task-oriented and authentic. Mahdavy undertook a comparative study of the cognitive demands of these two tests by giving 151 participants a TOEFL listening test and 117 of these same participants an equivalent IELTS test. The participants also completed the Multiple Intelligences Development Assessment Scales questionnaire. Despite the differences between these listening tests, Mahdavy showed that intelligence scores positively correlated with listening scores on both tests and that linguistic intelligence has a significant correlation with listening ability as calculated by these tests. Mahdavy suggests that English language teachers should provide further assistance to language learners who might not enjoy a high level of linguistic intelligence.

#### **2.4 English language proficiency and academic results**

In 1993, Vinke and Jochems investigated the question of whether learning in a foreign language affected academic performance, arguing that the precise nature of the relationship between foreign language proficiency and academic success had not been established. Focusing on Indonesian engineering students at the IHE in Delft and using TOEFL scores as their baseline data, they found a cut-off point in the relationship of English proficiency and academic success. They then hypothesised that there was a range of TOEFL scores within which a better command of English increases the chance of academic success to a certain extent and within which a limited lack of proficiency can be offset by other factors (age, effort, mathematical ability). If this was correct, then it would not make a difference whether TOEFL scores were below the lower limit or above the upper limit - in either case, improvement of proficiency would not contribute substantially to a better academic performance (Vinke and Jochems, 1993, p 282). These researchers suggested that additional research was needed to determine what variables account for international students' academic success or failure, so that 'criteria may be set accordingly and appropriate measures may be taken to raise the chance of international students being academically successful in an English-medium instructional setting' (Vinke and Jochems, 1993, p 284).

Cotton and Conrow (1998) reviewed a number of previous studies into the relationship between various English proficiency test results and academic outcomes, finding that the number of studies which found no statistical significance was roughly equal to the number which found significant correlations, while others yielded either inconclusive or mixed results. They concluded that the relationship between English proficiency and academic outcome was more ambiguous than one might initially suppose. Graham (cited in Cotton and Conrow 1998, p75) explained the reasons for this thus:

“First of all, there has been continued debate about the exact nature of language proficiency; secondly, the difficulties of testing language proficiency and the extent to which it could be measured with a high degree of reliability and validity; thirdly, the moderating variables which affect student performance in the testing situation and a number of intervening

variables which affect students' academic performance, finally, the definition of academic success is ambiguous and is open to interpretation and hard to define."

One important study cited by Cotton and Conrow was the Validation Project for the (previous) ELTS conducted by Criper and Davies (1988) which sought to investigate not only predictive validity but also the construct, content and concurrent validity of ELTS. Criper and Davies concluded that the contribution of language proficiency to academic outcome is about 10%, a correlation of 0.3. This suggested that language does contribute to academic success but does not play a major part. Cotton and Conrow (1998) themselves tested the predictive validity of IELTS at the University of Tasmania. In correlating IELTS with students' Grade Point Averages (GPAs), only the reading subtest had a moderate positive correlation with academic results and in the case of the speaking subtest there was a negative correlation (Cotton and Conrow, 1998, p 92). Staff ratings of students' academic performance showed a weak positive correlation between the reading and writing subtests and academic performance. Staff ratings were then correlated with GPAs and these showed a reasonably strong correlation ( $r=0.73$ ). In the second semester of study by the students under investigation, there appeared a link between IELTS Reading and Writing subtest scores and students' self-ratings of academic performance. While no significant correlations were found for IELTS global scores, there appeared to be weak correlations between the reading and writing subtest scores with two of the three measures of academic outcomes. The reading subtest scores in particular were better able to predict subsequent academic performance. Cotton and Conrow (1998, p 109) concluded that language proficiency alone was no guarantee of success as other variables may have equal or more importance.

Dooley and Oliver (2002) studied the predictive validity of IELTS in Faculties of Business, Science and Engineering. Correlations between the students' semester-weighted averages (SWAs) and IELTS scores were calculated for the entire group and by discipline. Dooley and Oliver cited previous argument that students who scored higher on a standard English test would have a greater chance of future academic success, though some previous researchers had argued that it is mainly at low levels of proficiency that language makes a difference. Dooley and Oliver (2002) also found that English language proficiency was only one among many factors that affect academic success. They concluded that there was little evidence for the validity of IELTS as a predictor of academic success, although they did find the reading module the better predictor of academic success as it was the only subtest of the four macro-skills to achieve a significant correlation. Dooley and Oliver went on to suggest that 'overseas students who do not fully meet admissions criteria in terms of their language may well have the potential to succeed academically' (2002, p 51).

Feast (2002) investigated the relationship between English language proficiency (as measured by IELTS) and performance at university (based on GPA). Feast also investigated the related issue of the trade-off between raising IELTS scores and the consequent loss of international students, ie should the current minimum entrance IELTS scores be increased so that the students who gain admission to university courses have a reasonable chance of success? Using multilevel regression analysis on the results of 101 international students, Feast found a positive, but weak, relationship between English language proficiency, as measured by IELTS scores, and performance, as measured by GPA. Feast recommended that the overall IELTS score be kept at 6.0 for undergraduate students and raised to 6.5 for postgraduate students (but that students be required to have a score of 6.0 minimum in the reading and writing modules in both cases). Feast projected that the implementation of this recommendation would involve a loss of just over 40% of prospective undergraduate international students and result in a GPA gain of 0.9% and a loss of 70% of postgraduate students with a GPA gain of 4%. Recognising that these figures may be 'unacceptably high', Feast recommended raising support levels for international students.



Bayliss and Ingram (2006) investigated the questions:

- 1 To what extent is the language behaviour implied by their IELTS scores reflected in the language behaviour (in all four macro skills) of university students during the first six months of their degree program?
- 2 To what extent is the language behaviour observed adequate for the study program being undertaken by the student?
- 3 Are there implications for raising or lowering common IELTS requirements for entry to undergraduate or graduate courses?

Twenty-eight international students were interviewed, given a questionnaire and observed in a variety of class types, and a rating scale was used against which researchers could measure the students' language performance and compare their language behaviour with that implied in their IELTS scores. On question (1), findings suggested that IELTS scores could quite accurately predict students' language behaviour in the first six months of their study program but that individual students might perceive their language proficiency levels quite differently. On questions (2) and (3), answers varied with the Faculty in which students were enrolled, however Bayliss and Ingram cautiously suggested that there may be implications for raising the IELTS entry levels for courses which require students to use spoken English in vocational training contexts in the early stages of their studies.

Phakiti (2008) reported on a study aiming to predict international postgraduate students' academic achievement using three variables, viz. English language proficiency, English reading proficiency and metacognitive knowledge of strategic reading. The participants were 125 Chinese international postgraduate students who were in their second semester in an Australian university. Their English language proficiency was measured by the IELTS Tests, in particular their English reading proficiency, and their metacognitive knowledge of strategic reading was measured by a Likert-scale questionnaire. Through the analysis of the questionnaire, it was found that their English language proficiency, English reading proficiency and metacognitive knowledge of strategic reading accounted for 7%, 10% and 5% of their academic performance respectively.

A useful overview of the research on the correlation between English proficiency and subsequent academic performance is contained in Davies (2008) and a further useful discussion in Hyatt and Brooks (2009).

## **2.5 International students, English language proficiency and teacher education**

Language use in the classroom has, of course, been the subject of detailed concern in education, especially since the early 1970s, with the growth of the language-across-the-curriculum movement. This concern with language and the huge number of studies devoted to it has tended to focus on language as an instrument of pupil learning. Teacher language use in this tradition tends to focus on language-as-pedagogical-strategy. This literature is not concerned with the teacher's language background though it is highly suggestive in terms of teacher language use. A selection of the classic works in this huge corpus includes: Britton, 1970; Wilkinson, 1971, 1975; Creber, 1972; Cazden *et al*, 1972; Cashdan *et al*, 1972; Rosen and Rosen, 1973; Bullock, 1975; Marland, 1977. Some of this has focused specifically on the discourse structures of classrooms (Barnes *et al*, 1971; Barnes, 1976; Coulthard, 1977, pp 93ff; Sinclair and Brazil, 1982; Stubbs, 1976, 1983). Where the teacher's own proficiency with spoken language, in particular, has been an object of interest in teacher education it has tended to be dealt with often as a micro-skills issue, highlighting skills such as explaining, discussing, questioning etc (eg Turney *et al*, 1983a, 1983b). If one consults generalist texts for the beginning teacher, the issue of the teacher's use of spoken language is touched on when such texts deal with specific language *tasks*, such as:

- questioning (Barry and King, 1988, pp 77ff, 363ff; McBurney-Fry, 2002, pp 87ff; Arends, 2004, pp 429ff; Zwozdiak-Myers and Capel, 2005, pp110ff)
- explaining (Barry and King, 1998, pp 63ff; McBurney-Fry, 2002, pp 84ff; Arends, 2004, pp 284ff; Zwozdiak-Myers and Capel, 2005, pp 109-10)
- discussing (Barry and King, 1988, pp 372ff; McBurney-Fry, 2002, pp 92-93; Arends, 2004, pp 430ff; Zwozdiak-Myers and Capel, 2005, pp 113-14)
- responding to pupils (Barry and King, 1988, p 83ff; McBurney-Fry, 2002, pp 90ff; Arends, 2004, pp 287ff, 312ff, 441ff; Zwozdiak-Myers and Capel, 2005, pp 114; Capel and Gervis, 2005, p 132-33).

In terms of specific language *qualities*, such texts tend to deal only with the very global notion of ‘clarity of communication’ (Barry and King, 1988, pp 61ff, 354ff; Arends, 2004, pp 283-84). However, based largely on research in the contexts of non-native-speaker teachers/teaching assistants and her own observations, Elder (1993a, p 237) has developed a more extensive list of ‘desirable features of teacher communication’, which she has applied to non-native-speaker teachers, viz:

- intelligibility
- fluency
- accuracy
- comprehension
- use of subject-specific language
- use of the language of classroom interaction
- overall communication effectiveness

Moreover, Elder has elaborated on a ‘partially indicative’ (Elder, 1994b, p 10) inventory derived from Ellis (in Elder, 1994b, p 6ff) of typical teacher tasks in terms of language use. These are derived from studies of L2 teachers, and therefore aimed specifically at the teaching of a language and address teacher use of the target language. They include *medium-oriented interactions*, *message-oriented interactions*, *activity-oriented interactions*, *interactions which create a framework within which teaching can take place* and *extra-classroom language use*. LBOTE teachers operating in English and teaching subject content in a number of curriculum areas are not focused on *medium-oriented interactions* to the same degree as L2 teachers, however other areas of the inventory are usefully suggestive for considering the tasks which LBOTE teachers have to address while teaching subject content in a language which is not their L1. These tasks include:

- *message-oriented interactions*: eg explaining, categorising, labelling, presenting information, narrating
- *activity-oriented interactions*: eg giving instructions
- *framework interactions*: eg directing, disciplining, explaining, questioning, responding, rephrasing
- *extra-classroom language use*: eg selecting and preparing material, simplifying texts, writing memos, talking to parents, reading professional development material, attending professional development seminars (Elder, 1994b, pp 6-9)



In Australia the history of providing teacher-specific language-proficiency scales has tended to be largely related to proficiency for prospective teachers of foreign languages rather than of the English language proficiency of international student-teachers across the full range of curriculum areas (Elder 1993c; Elder, 1994a, 199b; Elder *et al*, 1994; Wylie and Ingram, 1995a, 1995b; Iwashita and Elder, 1997; Consolo, 2006). However, there do exist in Australia two quite widely used scales of English language proficiency focusing specifically on the language of the classroom and the proficiencies assumed to be needed in that context. Both are for teachers fully or partly trained overseas who are seeking registration in Australia and both test the usual four macro-skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). One of these tests is the version of the International Second Language Proficiency Rating (ISLPR) for teacher professional registration (cf ISLPR nd). In this test, speaking skills are judged throughout an interview on education-related topics, including the socialisation of young people. Some tests may include a simulation in which candidates take on the role of a teacher interacting with a student (the tester) about some aspect of the educational process (eg classroom behaviour). Listening is related to texts on education and the socialisation of young people, which may be news stories, news commentaries, interviews, talk-back, documentary material, community announcements or advertisements. The Reading Test is selected from curriculum materials (eg syllabuses or text-books), research reports, material from the media or professional journals (eg news stories, editorials, 'letters to the editor', columnists' opinions, feature stories), community information (eg brochures), advertisements or material related to conditions of employment (eg newsletters from an employer or union). Candidates are also asked to read aloud a short text, which is likely to be a school notice delivered to the classroom, or a self-contained section of a textbook or a 'big book' (depending on the candidate's teaching specialisation). The Writing Test in one section posits an audience of students, parents, colleagues or other members of the immediate school community, or officers in the education system. A second task is to write a memo, report, article or open letter (eg a letter to the editor of a newspaper) in which candidates will be expected to express opinions about education or the socialisation of young people (ISLPR nd).

The second teacher-specific scale available in Australia is the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT), developed for the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET), but recognised in many jurisdictions. The PEAT instrument is designed to determine the level of competence in English of overseas trained teachers who wish to gain approval to teach in NSWDET schools. Like the teacher version of the ISLPR, PEAT is not an assessment of subject matter competence but an assessment of English language skills within the educational context. The result obtained in each language component of the PEAT is meant to be an indication of whether a candidate's proficiency is of a standard which would enable them to teach and interact effectively and confidently in a school setting in NSW. The Reading Test focuses on a NSW DET policy text, a workplace related text and a sample of handwritten pupil writing. Listening is to discussions and a monologue on education-related topics. In the Writing Test, candidates are asked to write an incident report, a pupil handout or a note home and to give written feedback on a pupil's work after identifying errors on a sample of pupil writing. Speaking is judged on an interview, a role play and a presentation (UNSW Institute of Languages, 2009). As can be seen from these brief descriptions, there is an attempt in each case to provide workplace authenticity, and certainly context-specificity. Relevant scores from both the ISLPR (teacher version) and the PEAT are included in Table 4 below as points of comparison to the IELTS test.

The question of 'authenticity' raises many questions about language testing instruments. Twenty five years ago Spolsky (1985) asked the question, 'What are the limits of authenticity in language testing?' In other words, to what extent can a testing task be made authentic 'so that it constitutes an example of normal and natural language behaviour on the part of both examiner and candidate (?) And if it cannot be made authentic, what difficulties does this present to the validity of the test and the correct interpretation of its results?' (Spolsky 1985, p 33). Elder, in a series of articles on rater reliability has

raised interesting questions about the specific testing of language proficiency in the context of classroom performance. In Elder 1994a, she reported on an Italian oral proficiency test (for teachers of Italian) which required candidates to simulate the teacher role. Raters suggested that candidates who took the teacher role seriously and attempted to produce comprehensible input for an imaginary semi-proficient L2 audience placed themselves at a linguistic disadvantage by deliberately simplifying speech and slowing their rate of delivery. Elder concluded that there 'may be a fundamental incompatibility between the assessment of language proficiency, which assumes a developmental continuum involving an incremental increase in range and complexity of language use as proficiency progresses, and certain kinds of occupation-specific proficiency where certain features of pragmatic or strategic competence such as simplicity and clarity may be valued over elaborateness' (Elder, 1994a, p 56). Admittedly, students in the situation with which we are concerned here are not necessarily dealing with an imaginary audience who are less proficient in the language (in the case being studied here, the L1 language of instruction) than they themselves are – in fact, in schools where English is the L1 of most students, the reverse is likely to be true. However, in taking account of the need to use the language skills for teachers listed earlier – such as by simplifying explanations, for example – similar issues to those raised by Elder (1994a) apply. In fact, an earlier study by Elder addressed this issue. Elder (1993a) raised the question of linguistic experts such as trained language testers viewing second language performance differently from other 'linguistically naive' native speakers, in this case subject-specialist teachers. An implication from earlier research quoted by Elder is that if raters are concerned with gauging the impact of second language communication on the wider native speaker population, linguistic expertise may be a liability. In this article, she reported on a classroom-based assessment procedure to monitor the English proficiency of graduates from non-English-medium universities who were training to be teachers of Maths and Science in Australian secondary schools. The study arose out of a concern that substantial numbers of LBOTE graduates entering teacher education courses were unable either to function effectively during their school-based teaching practice or ultimately to perform credibly as teachers. The assessment procedure offered a means for determining the extent to which their difficulties were related to language. While the findings are reported cautiously, Elder found trends that subject specialist raters of LBOTE teacher trainees emphasised interactive strategies above all else, and considered language proficiency in terms of real-world criteria (ie, are teachers creating the necessary conditions for classroom learning to take place?) In behaving thus, they assessed language in terms of successful task completion. Language experts, on the other hand, tended to focus on the quality of the language sample elicited through teaching. Elder concluded that 'If we accept that there are instances where the formulation of an acceptable and intelligible message depends on discipline- or occupation-specific knowledge, the involvement of subject specialists as assessors (notwithstanding the strain that this may place on reliability) should be regarded as a condition of test validity' (1993a, p 249; see also Elder and Brown, 1997, p 77). The 'Hymesian' 'non-linguistic' factors (Elder, 1993a, Elder and Brown, 1997) in communicative competence which subject specialist teachers favoured in their rating of performance – sensitivity to audience, interactive skill and personal style – are indeed crucial attributes of teacher communicative competence, though they are not necessarily rated highly in language testing by language experts. In terms of using teaching simulations rather than on-the-job assessments, Elder and Brown (1997) built on Elder's earlier (1993a) conclusions by arguing that, 'Rather than being seduced by the appearance of authenticity into accepting that performance tests are necessarily more valid than traditional types of assessment, we need to find ways of ensuring that there is a reasonable degree of fit between behaviours elicited from candidates in the artificial environment of the test and actual performance in the target domain' (Elder and Brown, 1997, p 77).

In addition, Elder has suggested a number of principles for the testing of teachers of languages (L2) which can again be usefully applied in the context of LBOTE teachers operating in English. Because most possible uses of teacher language cannot be accommodated in a test, she suggests that the following principles drive testing:

- *scope*: all four macro-skills should be included, a broad range of language functions and each category of Ellis' inventory (referred to above)
- *frequency*: giving preference to tasks most frequently performed and greater weighting to speaking
- *importance* (Elder, 1994b, p 10).

Elder reported on a performance test (Elder, 1994b, pp 11ff) based on these principles, which consisted of:

- story reading
- story retelling
- assigning and modelling a role play
- cultural presentation
- pupil error correction

Again, most aspects of such a test would be appropriate in the situation of LBOTE teachers working in English for a range of curriculum areas.

Elder has also investigated the predictive validity of IELTS with specific respect to teacher education students at a range of tertiary institutions in Melbourne. Specifically (Elder 1993b) she has asked:

- 1 *Is performance on the IELTS test a reliable predictor of success in postgraduate Diploma of Education courses?* Elder found that IELTS can be regarded as a reasonably good indicator of short term performance in teacher education courses, though in the long term, 'the predictive power of IELTS diminishes' because of improvements in English language ability and the nature of the language variables likely to affect teaching performance (Elder, 1993b, pp 78-80).
- 2 *How does IELTS compare with each institution's screening procedures as far as the accuracy of its predictions is concerned?* Elder found that no substantial claims could be made either for or against IELTS when compared with other locally-applied procedures (Elder, 1993b, p 82).
- 3 *What is the optimum IELTS threshold for entry to teacher education?* To this, Elder answered that above global bands 4.5 and listening band 5.5, too many other factors (eg subject knowledge, cultural adaptability, understanding of classroom role relationships) were likely to interact with language ability in determining progress and should be taken into account in making initial student selection.
- 4 *Do scores on the reading, writing, listening and speaking components of the IELTS test predict the degree of difficulty experienced by candidates in performing coursework tasks?* No significant correlations were found, but the patterns in the data did show that the scores may have some value as a means of diagnosing the difficulties that candidates may experience with the language demands of their study (Elder, 1993b, p 86).
- 5 *Does second language instruction/exposure during the training year affect the relationship between predictions and outcomes?* The poor return rate of questionnaires made it impossible to calculate the impact of this variable on the strength of IELTS predictions (Elder, 1993b, p 87).

The data confirmed evidence from previous studies that it is at low levels of proficiency that language makes a difference (Elder 1993b, p 72). Patterns in the data did show that the IELTS scores have some value as a means of diagnosing the difficulties that candidates are likely to experience due to the language demands of their teacher education studies – thus, the lower their writing score, the more likely it is that the candidates will perceive essay writing as problematic; listening ability predicts difficulties with lecture and tutorial comprehension better than do scores for other test components, and the reading test score is the best predictor of difficulties reported in reading academic texts. This study indicated that English language support may continue to be necessary even at the higher levels of language proficiency. Elder (1993b, p 88) recommended that entry level thresholds regarding English language proficiency should be set by universities in accordance with their capacity to provide such support. (More recently, O’Loughlin and Arkoudis [2009] found that the degree of English language support students sought within the university and the degree of contact with English they had outside the university strongly influenced their language improvement).

Viète (1998) pioneered a culturally sensitive assessment procedure, the Diploma of Education Oral Test of English (DEOTE) for gauging the oral communicative competence in English of international student-teachers. This test was developed because ‘none of the large-scale testing systems (TOEFL/TSE/TWE, IELTS) or rating scales (ASLPRs) adequately reflected the demands of teacher training on communication skills in English’ (Viète, 1998, p 173; Viète’s reference is to the former Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating, now superseded by the International Second Language Proficiency Rating). Specifically, the IELTS Speaking Test ‘did not provide opportunities for candidates to produce the range of oral communication expected of student teachers in tertiary tutorials and secondary classrooms and thus lacked construct and content validity’ (Viète, 1998, p 173). Some of the skills which large-scale tests are unable to elicit, but which DEOTE does elicit include ‘the requirements of effective listening in multichannel conversation, the need to manage speculative language and the skill of explaining a concept in more than one way’ (Viète, 1998, p 174). The DEOTE has been used to rate international students on five levels of performance from ‘unsatisfactory’ to ‘advanced’, with two levels used to indicate whether the candidate requires extended or minor support. Viète (1998, p 172) argues that support programs need to be ‘designed to extend students’ communicative competence and experience with the local educational culture once they are on course.’ An important feature of the DEOTE is that it is administered by teacher educators. ‘Two trained raters are used, one an expert in the disciplinary discourse in which the candidate has qualifications (eg Science), and the other a practitioner in TESOL and teacher education’ (Viète, 1998, pp 179-180). The ratings generated against the assessment criteria by the two teacher-educator raters are moderated through discussion that clarifies differing interpretations. This means that the teacher educators who are to teach these students not only meet the students, but learn more about the relationship between linguistic performance and content area discourse. Thus in terms of cost effectiveness there is the added ‘beneficial washback from the test. Teacher [educators] involved in testing have become more aware of the communication skills their [teacher trainees] need to develop, and have attempted to take account of these in their course design’ (Viète, 1998, p 180). The dual function of this test, in assessing student-teachers and in educating teacher educators about how to address their needs, must be taken into consideration in judging the cost effectiveness of the DEOTE.

In a study of the authenticity of the testing of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) for teacher education students, Elder (2001) investigated:

- 1 whether the domain of teacher proficiency was distinguishable from other areas of professional competence or from ‘general’ language proficiency
- 2 what constituted appropriate task design on a teacher-specific instrument



3 the role of non-language factors in a candidate's response to a contextualised test task.

Though agreeing that teaching required highly specialised language skills, Elder argued for caution in the application of LSP testing because of the indeterminacy of performance-based tasks as a means of measurement.

Woodrow (2006) investigated the predictive validity of IELTS for Education postgraduate coursework students, along with academic staff attitudes to English proficiency. IELTS subtest scores were correlated against students' semester 1 grade point averages (GPA). Other personal experience variables obtained through a questionnaire were included in the analysis. Academic staff completed questionnaires concerning their views on the English proficiency of students. The results indicated that English language proficiency as measured by IELTS is moderately predictive of academic achievement in the first semester of study for the student sample. Weak but significant correlations were obtained between overall IELTS bands and GPA. There were significant correlations between writing, speaking and listening subtests and GPA. No significant correlational relationship between other variables such as professional experience and academic achievement, as measured by semester 1 GPA, was found. The analysis indicated that at a lower level of English, the relationship is stronger than at a higher level. Thus, for students scoring 6.5 or lower, proficiency may influence their achievement, whereas with students scoring 7 and above, English proficiency does not influence academic performance.

## 2.6 International students, teacher education and general support

Success in teacher education depends not only on the grades assigned for academic essays and tutorial presentations, but also on performance during the school-based teaching practicum. It has been argued convincingly that the language of the classroom differs in its structure from other forms of discourse, and that particular types of interaction are more conducive to student learning than others. Teachers need to be able to correctly model important information, to tailor their language to make it intelligible to students, to give clear instructions and to process and synthesise learner feedback which may be expressed in nonstandard varieties of English. Without high levels of comprehension and considerable flexibility and fluency of expression it is unlikely that non-native speakers who are training to be teachers will perform effectively in this crucial area of their professional education. Effective classroom management will also depend heavily on choice of register and appropriate non-verbal behaviour, both of which assume an understanding of role relationships between teacher and student. The norms underpinning classroom role relationships vary significantly across cultures and this may cause communication difficulties for those educated elsewhere (Elder 1993b, p 73).

Moving beyond the specific issue of language testing, in investigating the optimum kind of support available to NESB students in teacher education, Cruickshank *et al* (2003) focused on the development of provision for a group of 110 overseas-trained teachers undertaking teacher education at the University of Sydney between 1999 and 2003. They concluded that the most effective model of support for international students was one which was centred on content-based units, that is support which linked language with specific course content. This included support courses, individual mentoring, tutoring and self-directed learning (Cruickshank *et al* 2003, p 245).

McCluskey's (2004) study also focused on the experiences of an international teacher education student in rural Queensland and investigated the two questions: 'What are the major cultural differences encountered in schools by pre-service international teachers in Queensland? To what extent do these differences impact on their professional roles?' The subject of the study did not perceive large cultural differences that could impact on his professional role, but McCluskey (2008) found that there were issues not conveyed to the student at a point when strategies could have been implemented to counteract them.

Carpenter (2005) reported on a study in one Australian university in which NESB teacher education students had experienced difficulty communicating with children because of accented English language, as well as difficulty managing the culture of schooling and the expectations placed on them during the practicum. Each student experienced a level of ‘shock’ when confronted with the realities of classroom life especially with regard to behaviour management (pp 5-6). These students’ lack of success on practicum showed their need for greater support than was available from the supervising teachers. The School of Education put in place a one-to-one mentoring project with a small group of students which, at the time of Carpenter’s reporting on it, appeared to be working successfully. She called for adequate university support for NESB students which was discipline-specific.

Campbell *et al* (2006) studied the perceived concerns and challenges of international students prior to, and during, teaching practicum. They argue that, ‘Whilst NESB student teachers perceived similar anxieties about practicum to their peers, they also confront language, communication and cultural differences which may hinder their successful completion of field experiences in schools.’ (Campbell *et al* 2006, p 2). They reported on a program designed to enhance the confidence and skills of these students in undertaking their field experience placements. The main findings from interviews during the program were that: participants claimed that they were more familiar with teacher-centred approaches (p 7); that they were embarrassed to have their language corrected by supervising teachers, especially in front of children and parents (p 7) and that behaviour management was a prominent area of stress due to an unfamiliar pupil-teacher dynamic (p 8).

Spooner-Lane *et al* (2007) examined the changing perceptions of international student teachers enrolled in a one-year teacher training program and explored the issues they faced as they prepared for practicum in order to determine whether international student teachers’ beliefs and expectations of practicum were incompatible with the realities of schooling in Australia. International student teachers’ perceptions of practicum before and following school experiences were examined. Before they engaged in the practicum, most of the international student teachers felt relatively confident about the upcoming practicum experience. The findings suggested that international student teachers’ positive perceptions of practicum were related to a somewhat simplistic view of teaching. They seemed unaware of how their teaching beliefs, formed in their country of origin, were misaligned with teaching in an Australian context. The practicum experience itself instigated a deeper awareness of the complexities of teaching and a more sophisticated understanding of the teaching knowledge and skills they lacked, which actually reduced their confidence. International student teachers realised that they needed to learn more about Australian school culture and teaching practices. Spooner-Lane *et al* (2007) concluded that Australian universities can better support international student teachers enrolled in the one-year teacher education training program by offering these students a differentiated mode of delivery for practicum, including a gradual developmental approach and mentoring training for supervising teachers.

In sum, for LBOTE teacher education students, successful course completion means that the language issues they must address encompass not just listening and reading comprehension or success in academic writing, but their ‘performance’ of oral and written English in classrooms, as well as a number of issues such as the differences in school cultures from that of their own backgrounds.

### **3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Site selection**

This research focuses on graduate entry secondary teacher education students whose first degree was completed in a non-Anglophone culture. It was initially anticipated that the relevant courses might provide significant numbers of appropriate students, possibly clustered in particular secondary Method areas, especially Mathematics, Science, Technology and Languages. It was also anticipated that the Melbourne and Sydney metropolitan areas would potentially contain the greatest numbers of such



students. During the first stage of the research in late 2008, all University registrars in the Melbourne and Sydney metropolitan areas were contacted and asked about the proportion of graduate entry secondary teacher education students who had been subject to IELTS (or similar) testing in their 2008 cohort. Relevant course co-ordinators were also directly contacted and asked to provide details on the proportion of students who had been subject to IELTS testing in their courses. To ensure reasonable proportions of students in the Faculties to be consulted, we widened the consultation to include one university in Adelaide with a significant proportion of international students enrolled in teacher education. Eventually four teacher education Faculties with the highest proportion of relevant students in graduate entry secondary education were chosen as case studies for interviews.

### 3.2 Site studies

The relevant universities were in Sydney (1), Melbourne (2) and Adelaide (1). For each of these Faculties, semi-structured interviews were conducted with: academic staff teaching in the courses, course co-ordinators and one Head of Faculty. In addition, a focus group was conducted with one group of students in one university, and with one group of academics in another. Representatives of one state teacher registration authority were also interviewed. The interviews were aimed at determining views on:

- 1 the English language proficiencies of LBOTE students (specifically those who have been subject to IELTS testing)
- 2 the degree to which English language proficiency is an issue in the practicum success of these students (relative to other factors such as lack of familiarity with Australian schooling practices)
- 3 the adequacy of current IELTS admissions scores into the relevant courses
- 4 what an adequate IELTS admissions score into teacher education courses might be

### 3.3 Data analysis

The analysis of the interviews and relevant policy texts used established procedures for data reduction verification (Emerson *et al*1995; Ezzy 2002; Hatch 2002). Data reduction involved the usual procedures:

- 1 open coding: assigning labels to meaningful chunks of information (data segments) to analyse the whole data set
- 2 axial categorisation was used to subdivide this mass of data segments according to their emergent patterns, relationships and themes
- 3 interpretive summaries were produced focusing on the tentative explanations and conclusions to be drawn from this analysis; these summaries tested the logical consistency of claims
- 4 data verification was by means of the research team members' cross-checking each other's analysis to ensure the robustness of conclusions based on supporting evidence.

## 4 BASELINE DATA

Baseline data on IELTS scores into graduate entry secondary education in *all* metropolitan universities in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide which offer teacher education are contained in the following Tables. Included in each Table are comparative data on general postgraduate entry and the requirements of local teacher registration authorities.

INSTITUTION	Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS scores for entry into Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS General university entry level scores (Postgraduate)	IELTS Requirements of NSW Institute of Teaching	Is course specifically targeted at international students?
Australian Catholic University	Master of Teaching/ Graduate Diploma in Education (MTeach/DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 7.0 in each subset)*	Varies	7.5 overall (min.8.0 in Speaking/ Listening; Min. 7.0 in Reading/ Writing)	No
Macquarie University	Graduate Diploma in Education (DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 7.0 in Reading/ Writing; min. 6.0 in Speaking/ Listening)	6.5 overall (min. 6.0 in each section)	As above	No
University of NSW	Diploma in Education (DipEd)	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each section)	6.5 overall (min. 6.0 in each section)	As above	No
University of Sydney	Master of Teaching/Bachelor of Teaching (MTeach/BTeach)	7.5 overall (min.8.0 in Speaking/ Listening; min. 7.0 in Reading/ Writing)	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each sub-test)	As above	No
University Technology of Sydney	Bachelor of Teaching in Secondary Education (BTeach)	7.0 overall (min.7.0 in Writing)	6.5 overall (min. 6.0 in Writing)	As above	No
University of Western Sydney	Master of Teaching (Secondary) (MTeach)	7.0 overall (min. 6.0 in each subset)	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each subset)	As above	No

\* The terms 'sub-test', 'subset', 'section', 'module' and 'band' are the terms used on the universities' own websites and refer to the specific sub-areas of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking on the IELTS test

**Table 1: IELTS entry score data (Sydney universities)**

INSTITUTION	Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS scores for entry into Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS General entry level scores (Postgraduate)	IELTS Requirements of Victorian Institute of Teaching	Is course specifically targeted at international students?
Australian Catholic University	Master of Teaching/Graduate Diploma in Education (MTeach/DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 7.0 in each subset)	Varies	7.0 in each band	No
Deakin University	Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) (DipEd)	7.0 overall	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each subset)	As above	Yes
La Trobe University	Graduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) (DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 6.5 in each band)	6.5 overall with (min.6.0 in each band)	As above	No
Melbourne University	Master of Teaching (MTeach)	7.0 overall (min. 7.0 Writing/min 6.0 in others)	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each subset)	As above	No
Monash University	Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) (DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 6.5 on Reading/Listening; min. 7.0 on Writing/Speaking)	6.5 overall with (min.6.5 on Reading/Listening; min. 6.0 on Writing/Speaking)	As above	No
RMIT University	Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary)	7.0 overall with 6.5 in each section	6.5 over all with (min.6.0 in each subset)	As above	No
Victoria University	Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education (DipEd)	7.0 overall (min. 6.0 on all)	6.5 overall (min.6.0 in each subset)	As above	No

**Table 2: IELTS entry score data (Melbourne universities)**

INSTITUTION	Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS scores for entry into Graduate entry pre-service courses	IELTS General entry level scores (Postgraduate)	Requirements by Teachers Registration Board of South Australia	Is course specifically targeted at international students?
Adelaide University	Graduate Diploma in Education (DipEd)	6.5 overall (min. 6.0 in all subtests)	6.0 overall (min. 6.0 in Writing/ Speaking; min. 5.5 in Reading/ Listening)	7.0 overall (min.7 in each of the modules)	No
University of South Australia	Graduate Diploma in Education (DipEd)	7.0 overall (min 6.5 in Reading/ Writing)	6.0 overall	As above	No
	Master of Teaching (MTeach)	6.5 overall (min. 6.0 in Reading/ Writing)			Yes
Flinders University	Master of Teaching (MTeach)	7.0 overall (min.7.0 in all sub-bands)	6.0 (min. 6.0 in Speaking/ Writing)	As above	No

**Table 3: IELTS entry score data (Adelaide Universities)**

Table 4 represents the language proficiency requirements of the teacher registration authority in each state and territory of Australia (except the Australian Capital Territory in which at the time of writing, there is no mandated teacher registration authority). Other relevant scores (eg ISLPR, TOEFL, PEAT) are provided for comparison.

<b>Teacher registration authority</b>	<b>IELTS scores</b>	<b>Other recognised tests</b>	<b>Who has to meet these requirements?</b>
New South Wales Institute of Teachers	Minimum overall score of 7.5 including a minimum result of 8.0 in both the Speaking and Listening modules and 7.0 in Reading and Writing	ISLPR: at least 4+ in each of the four areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing PEAT: Band A in each of the four areas: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing	An applicant whose first language is not English and who did not gain the majority of his or her qualification in English in a country where English is the main language (ie Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom Republic of South Africa and the United States of America) unless they can show evidence of having taught successfully in English in a school in a country where English is the main language for a substantial period of time.
Victorian Institute of Teaching	Level 7 in each of the areas of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing	ISLPR: Level 4 in each of the areas of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing PEAT: Band A in each of the areas of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing	Applicants who have not completed teacher education qualifications at an Australian institution or in English.
South Australian Teachers Registration Board	Minimum 7 for each of the modules Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking	ISLPR: minimum score of 4 in each of the macroskills of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking PEAT: Band A in all four components of Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking	All applicants for teacher registration, with the exception of graduates from pre-service teacher education programs in: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United States of America, United Kingdom .
Queensland College of Teachers	Minimum 7 in each of the areas of Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening	ISLPR: 4 for Speaking, Listening and Reading and 3+ for Writing	Persons who have not undertaken their preservice teacher education program in English in an exempted country (ie Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom and United States of America).
Western Australian College of Teachers	An overall band score of 8 and if one individual score is less than 8, it must be 7 or 7.5 in either Reading, Writing, Speaking or Listening		Applicants who did not complete secondary education in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom or United States of America or did not complete teacher education in these countries or are not registered teachers in Australia or New Zealand or did not complete both secondary education and teacher education in English if from South Africa.
Teacher Registration Board Tasmania	Minimum 7 in each of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing		Applicants who have not completed their pre-service program of teacher education in: Australia, Republic of Ireland, Canada, United Kingdom, New Zealand, United States of America (or graduates from the University of the South Pacific).
Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory	7 or higher in each of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing	ISLPR: 4 or higher in each of the macro-skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing PEAT: Band A in all four components of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing	Applicants who did not graduate from pre-service teacher education programs in Australia or English-speaking Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, and United States of America.

**Table 4: Language proficiency requirements of Australian teacher registration authorities**

## 5 LBOTE TEACHER EDUCATION STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Students in one university's Faculty of Education were interviewed as a focus group on their perceptions of English language proficiency issues. These students were from a metropolitan university which had created a specific secondary teacher education course for students on international student visas. These students' first degrees had been undertaken in a country in which the majority language was not English. Ten students took part in the focus group. One student was Japanese, one Sri Lankan and the rest Chinese or Indian. They represented the teaching areas of English, Mathematics, English as a Second Language, Japanese, Chinese and Social Sciences. All had gained an overall IELTS score to enter the course of between 6.5 and 7.5. All had completed their full practicum requirements and most had completed the course. The focus group responses are reported below by question.

### 5.1 Having been in your teacher education course now for some time, what are your views on the demands of the course in terms of your English language proficiency?

Students listed their specific language-related problems as follows:

- becoming familiar with the colloquial language and Australian idiom - both with respect to their fellow (local) students and with respect to their practicum pupils (one student referred to his pupils' use of 'the 'like' word'). All students referred to their pupils as 'speaking very casually' and contrasted this with their own schooling (*both* in learning English *and also* in their L1). The fact that their pupils' use of a more colloquial language was simply evidence of being comfortable in their own L1 may have been recognised by the students, but their focus was on this language as a barrier to their communication with pupils
- the academic English demands of their course, both in terms of academic writing conventions and of the language of instruction
- the issue of accent. This was an issue in their understanding of others, but especially in others' understanding of them, including lecturers, fellow students and their practicum pupils
- certain pronunciation conventions, which differed between countries. Speed of speaking was also, of course, a related issue
- semantic differences. This especially impacted in schools and especially for Mathematics Method students. Indian students used the example of the phrase '2 *into* 3' meaning '2 x 3' in their own school education – semantically the reverse of the case in Australian schooling, where the term *into* refers to division. These differences had caused some problems in communicating with their classes, necessitating intervention by supervising teachers. Thus, for some students, the language of the subject itself was sometimes slightly problematic

Some of the language issues which they themselves identified may seem to be largely those which any person trying to cope in a foreign language might encounter. However, what may be ordinarily perceived as minor issues (eg teenage colloquialism) become magnified in the situation of communicating with pupils on practicum. The much more public 'performance' of English in all of its modes - especially speaking, writing and listening - is a major issue for teacher education students on practicum. This in turn means that the linguistic factors identified here take on a greater urgency than is the case for other users of English-as-a-foreign-language. One stark example of this is the case of these students responding to their pupils in their practicum classes - an example of listening, thinking



and formulating one's answer 'on the spot' in English, and a contingency that cannot be planned for in the way that much speaking, reading and writing can be planned in advance by a teacher. A key issue for these students was being comfortable enough to respond quickly and appropriately to their pupils. One student supplied the title for this research when he referred to local student teachers being able to 'play the classroom tennis very well' (referring to the back- and-forth of classroom dialogue and interaction with pupils) compared to him. Thus even those linguistic issues which we might see as very day-to-day, and not even necessarily specific to higher education, take on a different meaning when English has to be 'performed' in this context. The academic English of their coursework was listed as an issue (see next question), though the degree of support given for academic English within the Faculty of Education for these students was substantial and acknowledged as such by the students.

## 5.2 What interventions have been put into place to support you in terms of English language proficiency? Have these been suitable/adequate?

The Faculty of Education in question has in place a number of support mechanisms for these students. These include:

- a series of four course units which are peculiar to this international cohort- specifically:
  - an English language unit aimed at increasingly sophisticated understandings of language use in a range of contexts, including the discipline of Education
  - an introduction to Australian education. This unit is composed of school visits which include lesson observations. Some of these visits are to rural schools. This unit (4 hours per week of school visits for 10-12 weeks) also has an *extra* 2 hour per week 'support workshop' run by the Learning and Teaching unit – it consists of 'survival' English and 'academic' English (especially analysis and critical reflection) and is especially aimed at assignments, referencing, group assignments, giving presentations
  - cultural investigations in school
  - teacher-as-enquirer
- the Faculty employment of a PhD student to assist students with aspects of assignments. This student 'supports the support workshops'
- use of a retired teacher to mentor students in groups
- use of alumni as further mentors, who are themselves (mostly) teachers. All 2009 students had mentors, though prior to this, it was mainly 'at risk' students. The total group holds fortnightly meetings around language and acculturation.
- micro-teaching sessions
- 18 students are undergoing an 'international initiative' in 4 schools, in which they become the responsibility of one person in the school who runs a workshop or two for them on acculturation as part of the practicum.

The students find the English language unit especially 'very useful', as it covers a range of academic English concerns such as: report and essay writing; giving presentations, and critical analysis. Students also stressed the benefits of being in classes with local students - in terms of assistance and acculturation. This they saw as building confidence for interaction with their own pupils. While they believed skills taught in one area did carry over into other areas, all felt that more work on academic writing would be useful.

### 5.3 Where is the need for support greatest (eg through your study program, through the practicum)?

Most students felt that there was an equal need for support in both academic university work and preparing for practicum. In terms of the latter, key issues were:

- how to teach the content well
- whether one is a good presenter
- avoiding linguistic errors
- understanding pupils' language and culture
- understanding the language of other teachers
- having a quick response ready to student questions and answers

All students stressed the need for both they and their pupils to 'slow down' in speaking. They argued that, over time, they and their pupils became used to each other, though they were more willing to be patient about this than were their pupils.

### 5.4 Are other issues more important than just language proficiency in supporting your success (eg becoming familiar with the cultures of Australian schools)?

- becoming familiar with Western academic culture. Issues such as confronting 'plagiarism' as a concept for the first time were mentioned here
- becoming familiar with the cultures of Australian schools. Many issues were dealt with here and the following list captures the key ideas:
  - issues around respect for the teacher. All students argued that Australian schools were very different from 'home', where pupils were said to be 'more formal' and well-behaved. This was constructed as teachers being automatically respected 'at home', but having to earn respect in Australia. They felt that education was valued differently by both pupils and parents 'at home' and seen as 'the key to success'
  - Australian schools being perceived as 'more student-centred' than in their home countries
  - the differentiation of curriculum in Australia for specific pupil/pupil groups
  - a less examination-centred mentality. The pervasiveness of examinations in their home countries was a big issue for these students, which they saw as driving the curriculum. They did not necessarily see this as a negative or positive, perceiving it rather as simply what goes along with an ethos of education as the 'key to success'.
- behaviour management. While this definitely tied into issues of acculturation - being linked to the issue of respect for the teacher, for example (most commenting that in their home countries, badly behaved students were simply excluded from school) - students also recognised that it was both just as big an issue for local students, and of such great importance that it deserved to be listed separately. They saw it as an issue for which they:
  - needed more strategies
  - needed more knowledge ('the more we know, the more we can prepare') and

- depended heavily on language for success ('When you deal with this issue, you need to negotiate with them, so communication is very important').

Despite these problems, a number of students preferred what they perceived to be the greater focus on individuals of the Australian curriculum, recognising that the 'teacher-centredness' of their 'home' curriculum did not necessarily ensure that pupils were learning. One student said he 'couldn't teach at home...it's not actual teaching...I'd be happy to teach here'. They felt that the demands made of them in Australia made the standard of teaching very high because of the perceived need to make lessons more engaging. Though perhaps based on a romanticised view of students in their home countries as more compliant, the students in this group were identifying issues that were broader than issues of language alone and also had in common with local students the concern with behaviour management - a characteristic concern for all beginning teachers regardless of background (Arends, 2004, pp 29-31; Leask and Moorhouse, 2005, pp 22ff).

**5.5 Have your practicum schools identified English language proficiency as an issue for you? What about other issues (such as becoming familiar with Australian school cultures)?**

Some students identified language competence as an issue for their schools in response to this question, but just as many felt that their issues were identified by schools as no different from those of local students

**5.6 In the light of this, what do you think of the adequacy of your IELTS score for entry into teacher education and what do you think an adequate score would be?**

Students had strong personal views on the inconsistency of IELTS, telling stories of getting good grades in their course, but low grades on writing in IELTS, though 'we do a lot of academic writing' and after two years in Australia, 'we are proficient in English'. They strongly felt that IELTS was not a consistent measure of ability (or a good predictor of success, raising again an issue which cannot be a function of such a test, but which is clearly perceived as important by these students). The inconsistency in IELTS scores with relation to what they perceived to be their actual language-functioning abilities in English was a big issue for these students. A strongly expressed opinion was their belief that success in the Academic tests of speaking and writing depended on one's prior knowledge of the topic one was given to write or speak about. 'Topics', they argued, 'are crucial' - which in their view, made IELTS effectively a test of knowledge, not just language functioning.

However, when asked to discuss the scores on or near those required for entry into their course, all agreed that a score of '6' would be too low for entry into a teacher education course, even with two years study in the language following it. '6.5', on the other hand, was regarded as 'not too low', hence by default an overall score of 6.5 was regarded by these students as a baseline for entry into a teacher education course.

## 6 THE PERSPECTIVES OF REPRESENTATIVES OF ONE STATE TEACHER REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

Interviews were conducted with the representatives of one state teacher registration authority.

Questions asked were:

- 1 What is your feedback from schools on the English language proficiency of newly graduated teachers who have been subject to IELTS testing?
- 2 Are other issues more important to schools than just language proficiency in the success of such newly graduated teachers (eg becoming familiar with Australian school cultures)?
- 3 What support mechanisms are in place in the state system itself to support such newly graduated teachers?
- 4 In the light of this, what do you think of the adequacy of IELTS scores for entry into teacher education?
- 5 What do you think an adequate score would be?

In addition, these people were asked to make comparisons with the PEAT instrument used by the NSWDET. Though devised in NSW, all other states are aware of the details of PEAT. Answers are reported here in their entirety, rather than by question.

The key response was that issues about culture and values posed by teachers from non-Anglophone countries were ongoing challenges to schools. The main employing authority in the state in which this interview was conducted ran a pre-employment program for the relevant teachers as they joined the system. This introduced people to the socio-cultural mix of schools, to curriculum and to professional experience and assessment practices. The team running this pre-employment program present ongoing professional advice and support. These interviewees believed that PEAT had been accepted by the broader education community. This becomes relevant to this research in light of the belief that a required score on PEAT was at a higher level than generally accepted IELTS scores for entry into teacher education. While there is no way of making a strict comparison, the belief of this group was that PEAT was 'definitely' higher than a 7.5 in IELTS. The significance of this, if the group is correct in this estimate, is that IELTS university entrance scores into teacher education are generally lower than an instrument required by one major employer in Australia. These interviewees felt that universities were being less than fair to students if they gave too much 'leniency' on entrance in this area – either through setting scores too low or allowing RPL. This disadvantaged students in the long run, either because they could not cope with the academic program or because they may not meet employer requirements. These people were aware that for students subject to PEAT in the relevant state, only about 30% passed the test on their first attempt. In general, they believed that a benchmark of at least '7' would be better to gain admission to teacher education because students *may* then be able to reach '7.5' by the end of the course (if the course is 18 months or more). They felt that a student with IELTS '7' at the beginning of a one-year Dip Ed would rarely reach IELTS '7.5' by the end of the 12 months. They also felt that a student with a score of '6' or '6.5' at the beginning of a program would be unlikely to reach '7.5' even after 2 years. In general, they felt that the correct principle for IELTS was that the entry score should be at least as high as the mandated state requirement for registration. This would allow time for students to improve enough to reach a score above the minimum mandated requirement.

## 7 AUSTRALIAN TEACHER EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IELTS ENTRY SCORES

### 7.1 Background

**Faculty of Education 1** runs a large graduate entry Masters level course for pre-service secondary teachers. LBOTE students are a relatively high (compared to other universities) proportion of students and are all already Permanent Residents or citizens. Most LBOTE students are in Maths, Science and Computing Methods. Most LBOTE students are from the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent.

**Faculty of Education 2** runs a small course for international students only. It is at the Masters level and requires two years of study. Students are mainly Indian and Chinese, with small numbers of Japanese and others. Students are spread across subject Method areas with slightly larger numbers in Maths, Science, Languages other than English (LOTE) (Chinese) – the latter being now subject to quota because of the difficulty of placement in schools (there is no Hindi taught in local schools, hence LOTE Method does not encompass the L1 of many Indian students). The course is full-fee paying. All students are on student visas, though many want Permanent Residency. Local students, in contrast, study a Diploma in Education, which is a shorter course and their English needs to be better on entry. From 2010, the Masters course will expand to take in local students and the international students will simply be a cohort within the larger course.

**Faculty of Education 3** runs a one-year Diploma of Education (Secondary), which can be taken over two years part-time by domestic students. LBOTE students are a relatively high (compared to other universities) proportion of students and are mostly already Permanent Residents or citizens.

**Faculty of Education 4** runs a graduate entry Masters level course over 4 trimesters (1.5 years) full-time for pre-service secondary teachers, with an embedded 3-trimester Graduate Diploma of Teaching. Students are permitted to exit with the Graduate Diploma. LBOTE students are a relatively high (compared to other universities) proportion of students. This Faculty had previously run a Master of Teaching specifically for international students.

In all Faculties of Education in the research, there are relatively high numbers of LBOTE students. Academics from one Faculty offered their perceptions of why LBOTE student-teachers study secondary teacher education:

“Often they come through systems where there is more status teaching secondary and they think teaching adolescents is going to be easier. It (also) means they are able to work within their specific discipline area, (one) that they have studied at university. Whereas (in) primary, except for Languages and Music, you have got to be generalist.”

“From my conversations with international students and students who might be children of migrants who grew up here, they see that in teaching, secondary school disciplines are something that they know very well... They probably have a tertiary degree in Maths or Science so therefore the comfort zone is there. In primary teaching ... they need to teach the English language as a language as well and that is something that might stop international students from applying.”

In what follows, the academics' answers to the interview/focus group questions are reported by question.

### 7.2 What are your views on the English language proficiency of your international students who have been subject to IELTS testing?

#### 7.2.1 Fitness for purpose of the test

By its very nature, language testing does not reflect a student's overall ability to be part of an academic community. Because of this, some academics felt the reliance on language testing alone for entry for these students was a problem ('English language proficiency is not the only issue'). Others felt that an appropriate language test needed to be occupation specific:

"The IELTS speaking test isn't relevant to teacher education students because it doesn't demand very much flexibility of expression from students. It's a measure that we in teacher education have to use because it's a university measure that the institution requires, but it's not always helpful."

One critique of language tests was that similar (IELTS) scores reflected inconsistent language skill levels among students and the academics who argued this felt that this was more than just an issue of different scores on different sub-tests - one lecturer, for example, referred to the range of proficiency also varying across the sub-skills of speaking and writing. Students with the same scores who were well above the minimum entry into the relevant courses were still perceived to have marked differences between them. There was an expectation, then, among these academics that similar scores are meant to reflect reasonably consistent abilities and that this was not necessarily the case. In terms of fitness for purpose, however, an opposing view was:

"As far as I know, IELTS is the best English language proficiency test that has been developed... I am an examiner of speaking and writing; the Written Test is quite useful for knowing how well international student-teachers might cope with academic studies. Even the General English test helps to see how well they'll cope with writing and reading. The Speaking Test is as good as it could be for that kind of test that has to be done in that limited time. It's quite informative. The IELTS Test in itself does tell us quite a bit."

### 7.2.2 Student competence

There was disagreement among academics about where they felt LBOTE students' problems manifested. Academics in one Faculty felt that students' general oral ability was often better than their written ability and problems therefore did not manifest in conversation. The students, they felt, could function conversationally but needed to be able to read, write and understand nuance, which they could not necessarily do at a level appropriate to their (Master's) degree. Others, however, argued that:

"The main issue for LBOTE students in terms of communication is speaking and to some extent listening. The reading and writing is pretty good especially at the pre-service level; they can do assignments. They can write a very nice essay [but there] is no guarantee that they are able to engage in verbal communication - conversations about the content."

"... writing a piece of academic work; that is the benchmark for having a place in a particular course. At the Master's level there is so much emphasis on the writing of the assignments rather than participating at the classroom level. What do we do with these students? Should we not enrol international students who are interested in one of our Master's degrees just because they are not able to speak well? I am also not very sure that we should be stopping (international) students from enrolling in our courses because they are not able to speak as well as they are able to read and write... Of course associated with that is how... we test the speaking given the number of applicants that we may have."

Even comment on specific skills – such as speaking – needs to be nuanced, with groups of academics distinguishing between students' skills in private conversation and their public speaking, such as in tutorial presentations. These academics were arguing that when it came to academic discourse, LBOTE students in their courses became very visible. One academic summed up the issues



complicating the performance of spoken language in practicum classrooms in terms which again suggested the need for occupation-specific skills:

“... international students need to have skills that are strong enough to be able to re-formulate ideas in more than one way, and to be grammatically accurate enough to get the message across very easily... (Pupils) ask questions in ungrammatical ways... Students really need to be able to speak well enough in posing questions and they need to understand when (pupils) are asking questions even if they're making statements. So the listening and speaking skills have to encompass those abilities. They also need to be able to use speculative language because it is very important in education, whichever subject area you're working with. Reasonable control of conditionals is important as well... These characteristics need to be present, along with intelligible pronunciation. By intelligibility I don't mean 'mainstream', because there is no mainstream. So I do not mean necessarily imitating an Australian accent. I accept diversity but (require) intelligibility of speech.”

The conditions driving some Australian universities to recruit international students was noted by teacher educators and questioned on the grounds of students' marginal English language proficiency. This was noted in some Faculties as the tension between academics wanting higher IELTS scores and 'people making the decisions higher up' wanting lower scores in order to maximise international student numbers – the tension identified by Feast (2002). However, it needs to be noted that in other Faculties being discussed here, many of the LBOTE students are already Permanent Residents and not part of a cohort on student visas.

Some of the students who are on student visas enter teacher education programs through avenues created by universities themselves, such as through an English language college. The English proficiency of international students entering through these means was generally seen as relatively weak ('They haven't really got up to speed and they're not given another IELTS Test before they enter the university course') and again seen as part of the broader university drive to enrol international students into courses. One concern about using university Language Centres was the sometimes unrealistic expectations by university management about how quickly international students could increase their English language proficiency. Another concern was the considerable pressure on the university language and learning support staff.

Proficiency in the English language is a complex issue in itself, subsuming a web of inter-related issues:

- functional English
- the technical language of the subject these students teach
- academic English - the critical and analytical
- the spoken and written language demands of the profession in general: not just functioning 'on their feet' in the classroom, but producing material for students, communicating with parents etc
- the everyday language of the pupils in their classrooms
- the ability to be able to transform subject knowledge into explanations that are understandable by their pupils

Academics saw the need for assistance across this whole spectrum of language. Even having *knowledge about* language (such as grammar, of which many students see themselves as having good knowledge) is not the same as producing and understanding language. Academics find that students can have big gaps in understanding and though students learn to use the language enough to 'get



through' the test, the ability to teach *in* the language is at another level. Perhaps only occupation-specific testing can address this. One academic argued that in her experience, making a mistake or saying the wrong thing led students from some cultural groups to withdraw, and not engage, leading in turn to lecturers and others not seeing their problems. Another academic highlighted written English as the key problem, identifying grammar, vocabulary and some semantic issues as of most importance. There are also a number of other issues in language:

“(things) that we don't work on enough (are)face-to-face interviews...interaction with colleagues in school, or... interactions with parents. We may deal with this in the very last tutorial of the year, 'By the way you will be expected to do interviews with parents. Here are a few hints ... or a few "do's and don'ts."” But those pragmatic and strategic aspects of communication need to be dealt with much more explicitly.”

“It seems we cottonwool them throughout their teacher training year or years, but once they are out on their own in the school situation there seems to be another big step which is another enculturation shock which then often affects their language. So they might have exited from our course with good communication skills in listening, speaking and writing. But the initial shock when they are on their own in a school, particularly a country or a city school where they are the only non-native speaker, then they can go backwards for the first term or semester. We had graduates drop out within a term because they were physically sick; they couldn't cope with the actual situation. They feel they haven't been prepared for this during their pre-service training.”

“Communication-wise some Asian students are quite amazed at the way in which we 'think aloud' in conversations. In South East Asian cultures what is said is more or less the summary of what has been thought through. (Given the time this takes) they therefore come across as being hesitant and not participating in meetings and discussions. They have problems in interviews for jobs and interacting with staff in meetings and working on projects.”

In terms of classroom language, international student-teachers need to at least recognise the complexity of the issue if they're going to be able to teach well in Australia. One academic in Science education argued:

“One of the difficulties...becomes if they can't recognise this, then they just give information to (pupils) who don't have an opportunity to learn that scientific language either - certainly not in a meaningful way. International students need a flexible understanding of the language of Science, the concepts of Science, in order to communicate it well. For somebody whose first language is not English, that's quite a challenge. It's possible if the international students are open-minded and prepared to give it a go. Being able to practice is important and getting support in the school from the supervising teacher who isn't judging the international students just on their ability to use the English language but as much on their willingness to try.”

Finally, one comment on the issue of student competence did encapsulate the feelings of a number of academics interviewed and takes up a quite different perspective on the issue:

“It always worries me that we only talk about language proficiency at entry. We must also talk about responsibilities we have for students' learning, and taking advantage of the knowledge that international students and others bring. This means looking at linguistic diversity as a benefit rather than a deficit.”

### 7.3 Are you doing any internal testing of the English language proficiency of such students?

One Faculty of Education conducts a literacy test of all students in the course at orientation in order to check their academic literacy. Invariably, students who have had to take the IELTS test are made 'visible' by this test. The particular test picks up comprehension and interpretation problems and also reveals some students who have been out of the academic milieu for a while.

Another Faculty threw into focus some of the problems with internal testing:

“Until two years ago, we were able to use an oral proficiency test that was designed as part of a research project. So it is a validated instrument and it produced reliable results. We started to get more and more international students, but (the) only ...person organising and conducting the test...started to get exhausted. We simply couldn't find the time to do (the test). We were often doing these interviews by phone to places like Hong Kong and Japan, coming in all sorts of hours to assist the students who were there. The Dean decided that (it) was a workload issue, and we just had to stop.”

The details of this internal test are worth noting:

- it contained material from students' subject specialisms ('What does the diagram show? What topic would you be teaching about using this text? What knowledge do you have about this topic?')
- students were given 15 minutes for preparation, during which time they were also asked to think about an issue about which they wanted to ask the two assessors (eg classroom management)
- this issue was discussed and then students were asked to summarise the academics' responses and to ask further clarifying questions
- students were assessed on this discussion and on the subject-specific discussion in terms of both speaking and listening
- the two raters moderated their results
- scoring system: doesn't need any support; needs some support; needs moderate support; needs a significant amount of support - those in the last category would not survive in the course
- occasionally, a writing assessment task was also required if a student was regarded as 'borderline'.

This test is an example of an interesting and well-targeted response to the issue of student testing if issues of academic workload can be addressed. One other Faculty had conducted interviews in the past with all prospective students, but has had to cut this back to now interviewing only international students and only those whose applications in some way suggest they might need extra support.

### 7.4 What interventions have you put into place to support these students in terms of English language proficiency? How have these been funded?

In one Faculty, students are tested during orientation, and this is followed by the provision of academic seminars for students identified as in need. Seminars are run by the Learning Assistance Unit and tend to focus on: reading skills, interpretation/analysis, writing, using evidence and a course focused on spoken language in teaching. Students identified on the screening test also have 60 hours of mentoring by fellow (local) students, who undertake this mentoring as part of a professional experience unit. 'Spoken language and teaching' is a module taught after their first (stand-alone) week

on practicum. Classes discuss the language they saw on practicum and role-play scenarios. These sessions are compulsory for all mentors and mentees. The strongest parts of this program, the co-ordinator believes, are the discussions around practicum. The short, intensive nature of their (Master of Teaching) degree is seen as a problem by these academics, with many students attempting to complete the course in 12 months because of financial imperatives. Acculturation into the course itself takes time and the lecturers feel that students need to be supported more before the course begins. Many LBOTE students arrive feeling confident, do badly on practicum and then find they have missed the workshop support program. Funding for these initiatives has been dependent from year-to-year on the availability of funds at the Faculty level.

In a second Faculty, the following interventions are in place:

(1) The inclusion in the course of four units which are peculiar to this international cohort. These are:

- an English language unit aimed at increasingly sophisticated understandings of language use in a range of contexts including the discipline of Education
- a unit introducing Australian education. This unit is composed of school visits which include lesson observations. Some of these visits are to rural schools. This unit (4 hours per week of school visits for 10-12 weeks) also has an *extra* 2 hour per week 'support workshop' run by the Learning and Teaching unit – it consists of 'survival' English and 'academic' English (especially analysis and critical reflection) and is especially aimed at assignments, referencing, group assignments, giving presentations
- cultural investigations in school
- teacher-as-enquirer

The Faculty in question has recently taken the decision to make the international cohort a strand of the new Master of Teaching degree available to all secondary students and in this altered degree only the English language unit and the introduction to Australian education will be the distinguishing support units. Other Faculties also recognised the benefits of running credit bearing units that allowed international students to access appropriate support, though some areas of university administration sometimes see these units as inappropriate at Masters level. However, running courses which do not carry credit can impose insupportable costs on Faculties of Education.

(2) the Faculty employment of a PhD student to assist students with aspects of assignments. This student 'supports the support workshops'

(3) use of a retired teacher to mentor students in groups

(4) use of alumni as further mentors, who are themselves (mostly) teachers. All 2009 students had mentors, though prior to this, it was mainly 'at risk' students. The total group holds fortnightly meetings around language and acculturation.

(5) micro-teaching sessions

(6) 18 students are undergoing an 'international initiative' in four schools, in which they become the responsibility of one person in the school who runs a workshop or two for them on acculturation as part of the practicum.

The course co-ordinator would like to further supplement this support in the future with more use of classroom scenarios on video, more videoing and critiquing by students of themselves in micro-teaching contexts and perhaps supplementing these using Web technology such as *Second Life* for role-playing scenarios. The Head of this Faculty noted that the Faculty had funded some of these

initiatives, while others were 'funded' out of the generosity of staff and hence were not necessarily sustainable. Secondary schools used for practicum also contributed resources and made a huge in-kind commitment. Interviews with individual lecturers confirmed the Faculty's commitment - with each of them talking about giving these students extra time and extra help and making themselves more 'available'. As one lecturer noted, while he had no deliberate interventions, his 'pedagogical behaviour' was affected by the presence of LBOTE students and being approachable, open and available for assistance was itself an 'intervention'.

Various forms of Faculty-based supports are provided for international students in the remaining two Faculties. There was strong support among academics for LBOTE students' support being provided within the Faculties, rather than being 'farmed out' to an academic skills unit with very little time to give to students because of their own pressures. Such Faculty-based supports currently included:

- (1) reading study groups, in which LBOTE students discuss set readings in small groups and have one-to-one consultations with a funded staff member – however, recurrent funding of such a position is an ongoing issue. Ideally, the Faculty could provide 'a person ongoing, throughout the year for at least one day a week to support them....a trained person who would know the content, the subject matter, with a Masters Degree in the same area. It could be an ex-student or a good student who would help them in small group reading sessions and deal with other issues, such as counselling'
- (2) extra group tutorials provided for students by Faculty staff - though such service provision depends on the amount of time staff have available
- (3) individual assignment assistance
- (4) a teacher education camp. At the beginning of the year, in the second week of semester, one teacher education program takes all its students on a two day camp:

"For many international students that's the first time that they've been on a camp of this nature. We have a day where they're looking at different activities that they could do outside of a classroom to help engage students with their Science learning. We take them around the beach and the bush, running activities like an 'egg drop' by building a parachute from natural materials and they have to figure out how not to break an egg if it's dropped from a height. On the sensory trail they identify things on the beach that they see (could aid) learning about tidal action - all linked to what they'd be teaching. This time gives us an opportunity to get to know the students, see what some of the strengths and challenges there might be for the group, and gives them an opportunity to work with (pupils) from a local high school. On the second day of the camp, we bus in Year Seven (pupils) from a local school and our student-teachers work in small groups to teach them outdoor Science. That's an opportunity for all the student-teachers to talk to the Year Seven (pupils) about what's it like being a school (pupil), the transition from primary school, what school is like. We give our student-teachers a supportive environment to learn about schooling, learners and Science so as to develop some familiarity with the interests of school (pupil)s. It also gives the international students an opportunity to work with their peers and learn about the settings in which they'll be working... We make the experience as inclusive as possible so that everybody feels very welcome...and they feel connected to the group... (Nevertheless) some students find it an extremely challenging and overwhelming experience because it's nothing like what they've experienced before. They're not quite sure what's expected of them. Even though they're working in small groups, they might have quite fixed ideas about how (pupils) should learn or what teachers can do. That can be difficult for them to negotiate, becoming more open and flexible."

The university does not provide any fund for the teacher education camp other than for the academic staff. Over the years this camp has been reduced from one week to two-days-one night. Typically,

such strategies are funded by the Faculties. However, many universities have decided to centralise student support services previously provided by Faculties, often then tending to render these services invisible, thereby reducing their usage and thus any claims for having such support.

### **7.5 Are other issues more important than just language in supporting these students (eg becoming familiar with Australian schools)?**

Academics see courses in which students have to go into the field and 'perform' (eg teaching, nursing) as raising particular issues. All international-oriented programs are geared towards testing and addressing language, but academics argue that this is only one dimension of such 'performance' and is secondary to 'adjustment':

"The local students have a familiarity with the context and the cultural settings; it can make them look as though they know more than they really do. It can make them look more proficient compared to international students who are unfamiliar with the settings in which they'll be working. ... the first four-to-five weeks of the year, just before the practicum are always full of concerns about interacting with school (pupils), cultural issues and language issues, 'How am I going to understand what the student says?' 'How am I going to know whether the student is understanding?' As student-teachers they are very often very concerned about their own image in the first teaching round. They're more concerned about their teaching and themselves as teachers often than they are concerned about the students and their learning ... they're often concerned about their own image and what students will think of them. This is a very typical across all teacher education courses."

Familiarisation with Australian schools is a huge issue. Most academics argued that the biggest issues arose in practicum when students had to face both the foreignness of general Australian culture and the culture of Australian schooling. Many LBOTE students are from very different classroom cultures with different classroom dynamics. Academics strongly identified an issue of the disjunction between how their students were taught at school and 'how we teach here'. Some said the students tended to move into/favour a lecture delivery in teaching. LBOTE students who were residents rather than on student visas and who had some previous teaching experience in their home country could experience even greater problems:

"They may have very well been able to teach English as a Foreign Language; that's absolutely fine. But they come into the school (and) their biggest problem can be 'how to be' in an Australian educational institution; how to relate to peers, how to relate to your supervisor, what your responsibilities might be. They need special preparation and acculturation to the Australian education system before going into schools. ... It is those local people we're actually letting down because they haven't had to take an IELTS test because they're already citizens."

One academic talked of the problem of language *in* the practicum as the biggest issue. Part of this concerns spoken delivery, but the key problem is with interaction, especially interactive questioning. Students can ask a question of pupils, then ignore the response because they do not understand it, so questioning becomes a problem in terms of not responding appropriately to pupil questions and answers:

"their ability to actually catch the message, and then to respond in what is considered in Australia to be a timely manner. That means not a long pause time or using fillers which indicate you have received the message but will need a few more seconds or so to think about how you are going to respond."

A big issue, therefore, is listening comprehension - something that teachers have to do well, reflecting Elder's finding that 'good listening skills are crucial for effective performance in teacher education



courses' (1993b, p 83). Writing and speaking and questions-to-be-asked can mostly be prepared in advance, but listening and responding cannot and this creates problems. Language, of course, in all its complexity is ultimately inseparable from the acculturation issues:

“They’re all inter-connected. The more confident international student-teachers feel, especially in their speaking skills, the more potential there is for them to feel comfortable enough to question what’s going on in their heads and what’s going on around them. It’s a sense of relationship, connectedness or community that leads them to ask for more help; they have to feel they’re in a place where can relax and just try.”

Academics also identified the clash between the sorts of learning experiences that Australian school students are likely to have or expect to have - and the willingness of the student to see this as part of their learning to be a teacher:

“There is the attitude of the person who’s coming in - how open minded they are to a different system or whether they’re coming to reproduce their own system. From time to time there are international students who are so deeply entrenched in their own cultural context, who have very strong values around transmissive teaching or students’ listening and not asking questions. These then become extra challenges for international students who are also trying to ensure they’re proficient in the English language as well... Open mindedness is an essential characteristic of a teacher ... so they can see learning and teaching differently. International students come in with a particular view that they may or may not be aware of. They need to start to question whether that view works in Australia, and what it means to be in a classroom as a teacher in Australia. Allowing one to question one’s own views and allowing others to question these means using their teacher education program to experiment with other ideas.”

In this situation, students’ problems can manifest themselves in an overwhelming concern with classroom management, since many LBOTE students perceive their own schooling as having been composed of mainly passive classrooms in which pupils are not active or outspoken. A perceived need to earn respect, rather than have it bestowed automatically, can lead to feelings of inadequacy and then they just 'get used to' Australian classrooms when practicum ends. On the other hand, some academics saw this as largely no different to the problems faced by local students, while others felt that pupils were generally tolerant and willing to work with a teacher who was trying to build rapport.

As many argued, the whole issue of LBOTE students engaging in field-based experiences does raise the responsibility of the university program itself to address concerns about clashes of – in this case - pedagogical culture:

“... the basic principles on which we have developed our teacher education program makes explicit what we’re doing as teacher educators - we make our practice a basis for conversation with students. That doesn’t mean that they’ll agree with it or that they think that we’re doing the right thing because there’s always that disconnect in student-teachers’ minds between what happens at university and what happens at school. We provide opportunities for them to question their own practice through the experiences we set for them in the classroom.”

Making diversity a focus of educational practice was seen as valuable:

“We are talking about educational diversity rather than just one way of doing things. The truth is our teacher education courses are very culturally positioned. This is a sad thing because even though they have the intention to be internationalised they’re not entirely internationalised ... They do mention international examples and sometimes draw on students to shed a little bit of light on another way of doing things but that doesn’t always



happen. Of course, international students don't necessarily know much about their own education systems; they only know about their own experiences but they don't necessarily want to talk about that."

Assessment in their academic program is a key source of anxiety for these students:

"There is an onslaught of assessment in teacher education programs. I said 'onslaught' deliberately. It's just interminable, and it's really different. There is a lot of reflective writing. They're not used to that. There's a lot of writing plans, assessment tasks, rationale writing. It's different sorts of academic writing from what most people would be used to. Some international students are not used to any academic writing at all because they've been through Science programs, so people aren't as used to extensive writing, not used to this kind of writing. So assessment is a big focus throughout the year."

Finally, the students' need to have employment can compound many problems (it is this financial component that often works against their being able to come early into the course, for example). In fact, one academic referred to students' 'double struggle' - the academic languages they had to master and the need for paid employment while studying, which gave them less time to achieve that mastery. Students from cultures in which examinations were the only form of assessment at tertiary level were also seen by some as having problems with attendance, though it was recognised that attendance was equally affected by their need for paid employment.

#### **7.6 Where is the need for support most evident (eg through their study program, through the practicum)?**

Academics felt that support was equally needed through the practicum and the study program. Some also felt that a greater support system was needed in schools, along with professional development for teachers. One particular kind of appropriate support suggested was ensuring that courses were long enough for LBOTE students to gain the necessary skills and familiarisation with Australian schooling systems – not allowing the students in one course, for example, to take the course in an accelerated mode. LBOTE students, they argued, needed the time. Most academics were definite about LBOTE students not being allowed to take accelerated versions of the courses, though in some universities, marketing and recruitment practices worked against this (an issue discussed in Hyatt and Brooks, 2009, pp. 34ff, 42-44, 51-52).

At the same time as the number of international students has increased in universities in Australia, over the last decade universities have suffered severe cutbacks to funding, resulting in widespread cutbacks to teaching hours:

"In a one year course what can you do? We now only have eight weeks contact in first semester and eight weeks contact in second semester – we are with the students for two to three hours a week. (The course) has a one hour support session once a week during those eight weeks. There is not a lot we can do."

This comment came from a university in a state which nominally has a mentor scheme for beginning teachers and academic staff feel that 'Those mentors need to pick up the responsibility for supporting the international students ... because they are all experienced teachers, so they know what the situation is in the first term of when you are out on your own'.

Sound pre-practicum familiarisation was also seen as of utmost importance. In some Faculties, LBOTE student-teacher support included pre-course school-based induction:

"This pre-course is only a three-to-four day course that allows students to have a placement in school. Usually I have about 30 students in this course, which is held the week before their academic course starts. It's not focused on language as much as on trying to give them

a grasp of the system itself, how it works, how it is interpreted in a particular school, the culture of that school, the ways in which students interact with teachers... There is consideration of the language that teachers use in class for different purposes - for a task - for management. The student-teachers are placed with teachers in pairs; they shadow either a teacher or a class."

### 7.7 What have schools had to say about the English language proficiency of student-teachers? What about other issues (eg, acculturation into Australian schools)?

Schools have legal and moral responsibilities to educate pupils and to attend to their welfare, both of which can be affected if a teacher is not easily intelligible or cannot understand what a pupil might be saying. Moreover, through lack of 'school culture' knowledge, some LBOTE students behave inappropriately at school – such as through having wrong expectations of the degree of support to be provided to them; not taking the kind of initiative which Australian teachers expect; criticising the supervising teacher's methods; or not following disciplinary policies in the school correctly. For these reasons, schools sometimes see these students as not functioning at a level required by them. This can lead to a culture in the schools that is critical of LBOTE students. Principals are sometimes perceived as acting as gatekeepers and being reluctant to accept these students on practicum. Most academics felt that schools tried to be accommodating on the whole, but recognised that schools had concerns about the students' preparation for teaching and about their language. Schools, these academics believed, needed to see that they had a joint role in the preparation of teachers:

"There is a need for closer connections with schools, more conversations about how these student-teachers learn to teach, what good teaching is, how to support their learning and teaching. It's not easy to address this issue. It needs collective effort over time."

One group of academics saw 'language' in the schools as always being conceptualised as 'speech' and 'speech' as 'accent', leading to LBOTE students being labelled 'deficient' and 'unable to communicate'. They thus felt that the school system tended to collapse all issues into an issue of 'language'. Schools, for example, tended to say that students were not *listening* to advice, but in fact the students were not *understanding* the advice because of lack of 'school culture' knowledge and would not ask questions. Language testing, of course, cannot account for these factors and thus some argued that continually increasing IELTS scores was not an answer to these issues. Others, however, felt that 'Since (the IELTS was raised to '7.0') three years ago we've had fewer complaints from schools about the English language proficiency of the international students we send out'.

Academics again partly see their universities to blame, with the number of international students growing faster than schools could be prepared for them. One Faculty of Education with a relatively large cohort of such students serves a metropolitan area which is very Anglo-monocultural and with an identical teaching workforce. Academics from this Faculty felt that the gap was becoming harder to bridge with some schools, however, those schools involved in the Faculty's targeted 'international initiative' have grappled with these issues and it seems to be paying off. These are partnership relationships and rest on a different set of assumptions about who is responsible for preparing teachers, as well as throwing into relief questions about how one prepares teachers with a different set of capabilities, needs, demands and social capital from local students.

A final issue that is worth mentioning in terms of language preparation and the diversity of language tasks in which a teacher can be engaged, especially for Asian students, is the process of job-hunting:

"... recognising that you have to apply to each individual school, and you have to write different essays to address the 'desirables' and 'essentials' that each school is looking out for. This is a 'cultural shock' for Asian students; they find themselves in a position where

they have to sell themselves in interviews and their written applications. That is something they are not comfortable doing. (They expect) qualifications alone will get you a job, not telling people how good you are at communicating with parents.”

“... In the second half of the year I actually spend more time on helping international students to see how to present themselves to employers and how to write an application for a job because they’re horrible. They have to address all the selection criteria. We also have an assignment called the ‘Portfolio’ which is really helpful in the end but is a total mystery to the students in the beginning. In the end it helps them to find all the evidence that they need to promote themselves in an interview for a job.”

### **7.8 What revisions, if any, has your Faculty made to entry procedures in the light of this experience?**

At the time of writing, one Faculty from which interviewees were drawn is considering raising IELTS scores to ‘7.5’ to enter the course. Academics interviewed nevertheless felt that this causes a loss of potential of those lower than ‘7.5’. They argue that a score taken at a moment in time does not account for the ability of students to improve and that this is lessening the pool of people from whom to develop teachers. Capacity for growth, they argue, is not being accounted for.

A second Faculty will raise the IELTS score from 2010 to ‘7’, with ‘6.5’ across all sub-tests. Prior to this, the Master of Teaching entry (6.5) had been lower than the Diploma of Education entry (7) because the former course was for international students only and was two years duration compared to the shorter DipEd.

### **7.9 What is required by your local Teacher Registration body in terms of language proficiency? Is this more or less demanding than the equivalent university entrance requirement?**

It will be noted from Section 4 above that only one Faculty of Education in Sydney has the same IELTS requirement on entry to the course as its state teacher registration authority. One Melbourne Faculty meets the VIT standard on entry, though this is lower than the NSW standard. One Adelaide Faculty meets the standard of the South Australian TRB, though again this is lower than NSW. In each case, there is an implicit assumption that time in the course itself will enable students to meet the teacher registration authority requirement (cf next question).

### **7.10 In the light of this, what do you believe is an adequate IELTS score for entry into teacher education?**

Part of the answer to this question depends on the length of the degree in which students are enrolled, since it can be (is) assumed that time in the course itself improves students’ English – hence the University of South Australia in the Tables in Section 4 above can be seen to have a lower IELTS score for an international (student visa) cohort than for a more general cohort on the basis that the course for the more general group is shorter. Hence arguments from academics such as the following:

“(The entry level) should be tied to what the (teacher registration authority) requires. If they’re going to do a 4- year teacher education course it mightn’t have to be ‘7’; but on the other hand, they would be going out to the practicum, so I think it’s sensible for it not to go any lower than ‘7’, because those students will go out on teaching rounds early on in their course. They could fall into a hole almost immediately on their teaching rounds and be put off. It’s not really very fair on the students. They have to be at a higher level where they’re going to be required to go into a practicum early on.”

“... if there was enough support available it would be alright for starters to be at ‘6.5’ at the beginning of the 4-year degree. However, if there’s no language and acculturation support,

then no. If the Faculty doesn't have this support it makes a major difference to students. This includes what kind of lecturers they have, whether the lecturers will give them extra time to support them adequately. International students often don't ask for help; they don't use the lecturer like a local student would. They don't make an appointment to see you about their assignments when they should. The support is pretty important. In today's climate of lecturers' heavier workload, of having to do more and more, including more and more administration as well, it is understandable that lecturers may not say, 'Please come and see me anytime.' A more structured intervention where they meet a support person, have reading groups, is needed."

In the case of graduate entry programs, on which we have focused here, course length is considerably shorter (often one year in the case of a DipEd) and most academics have doubts about the capacity of these to provide the necessary English language development required for teacher registration and employment if the entry IELTS score is lower than that required for such registration. In such cases, the support provided by employers for beginning teachers becomes even more important:

In terms of finding a long term solution and support for international students who are becoming classroom teachers, the pre-service course is going to be too rushed and too crowded. The level and the nature of the support that they have as beginning teachers in classrooms are going to be very important. The mentor is going to be very important. Pairing such teachers with a native speaking teacher, or Anglo-Saxon teacher, is going to be very crucial. The selection of these teacher-mentors is going to be important. The skills and support that we give these mentors is equally crucial as is the support that we give for the beginning international teacher they are mentoring. There is a place for professional development of all the professionals involved; that goes all the way up to the education administrators.

In the case of graduate entry programs, then, some argue that:

"They should probably start their course with an IELTS score of '7'. I'm not quite sure how to balance what the universities require about different bands. For teaching, their speaking and listening should be higher to actually be able to work out what's going on. For their academic work they need to have good reading and writing skills; speaking and listening is where the Asian students are weaker. Local immigrant students are more likely to be worse at reading and writing."

On the other hand, in answering this question, academics in one Faculty returned to the key question that students have issues with the language *and* their academic subject matter *and* the socio-cultural aspects of Australian education. The key issue, they argued, is that these are not problems that will be solved by higher and higher IELTS scores, which they regard as the university 'missing' the problem. This group did feel that if support is in place for the student, then the student's language will grow and they saw this as the key issue – not just the student's entry score, but the potential for the course to increase the student's exit score. Institutions, this group argued, needed to rely not just on what a language test could provide but to focus on a greater number of dimensions of what students and the institution and the profession itself needed, especially in those courses in which field placement is fundamental. Testing people for reading/writing/listening /speaking was seen by this group as a limited world-view and only assessing what can easily be tested. In terms of a baseline score below which a student would probably not cope in the course because of language, about '6.0'-'6.5', they felt, was probably adequate. '7.5', they believed was too high because it excluded too many students, when potential success in the course depended on so many other factors. This view received support from other Faculties:

“It’s all mixed up with the other issues... like their willingness to think about their practice and how it might develop differently from what they’ve experienced as a learner. The personal and language attributes are closely connected.”

Recognising that the question of lower IELTS is a marketing tool for the university even in the face of requests from academics for higher IELTS, one Head of a Faculty with large numbers of students on student visas (and therefore subject to international marketing imperatives) saw the key question as being, ‘What should we wrap around IELTS (such as an interview system)?’

One Faculty in the research will raise its entry scores in 2010 from ‘6.5’ to ‘7’. This decision was taken to lift the standard of English in the course. One lecturer in that Faculty had ‘severe reservations’ about her students teaching in Australia based on their language proficiency on entering the course at their current score. This group would like to raise scores to at least ‘7.5’, but the university is resistant. Accepting students on a first-come-first-served basis means that the Faculty of Education cannot impose a higher score. They also felt that it was difficult to pin down a specific score as ‘adequate’ because of what they saw as the inconsistency problem - an important problem ‘because IELTS is a standard and if it isn’t a standard it isn’t anything’. If all ‘6.5’ students were like their ‘best “6.5”s’, they argued, it would be a good standard, but this is not the case. If this remains so, then raising the standard changes nothing. One academic felt that ‘7’ was *not* adequate because students already at that score were not being set up for success. Thus the question for this group also became, ‘What does the IELTS test mean?’ In particular, if students are coached to pass it, what does it represent in terms of language ability? It becomes a hurdle to jump, they argue, not a reliable picture of actual ability.

## 8 DISCUSSION

The literature on language testing and teacher education – particularly the work of Elder – suggests some important principles in relation to language testing in teacher education. Elder (1993a, p 237) has identified the following ‘desirable features of teacher communication’:

- intelligibility
- fluency
- accuracy
- comprehension
- use of subject-specific language
- use of the language of classroom interaction
- overall communication effectiveness

In addition, she has usefully elaborated on a ‘partially indicative’ (Elder, 1994b, p 10) inventory derived from Ellis (in Elder, 1994b, p 6ff) of typical teacher tasks in terms of language use. These include:

- *message-oriented interactions*: eg, explaining, categorising, labelling, presenting information, narrating
- *activity-oriented interactions*: eg, giving instructions
- *framework interactions*: eg, directing, disciplining, explaining, questioning, responding, rephrasing



- *extra-classroom language use*: eg. selecting and preparing material, simplifying texts, writing memos, talking to parents, reading professional development material, attending professional development seminars (Elder, 1994b, pp 6-9)

Moreover, Elder (1994a) has indicated the importance of taking account of discipline-specific competence in testing language – in the case of teacher education, recognising that language competence involves creating the necessary conditions for classroom learning to take place, which may, for example, necessitate simplifying language in the real-world situation. The need for subject-specific language support was also highlighted by the participants in Hyatt and Brooks (2009, pp 46-47, 54-55).

To Elder's lists should be added the aspects of language identified by our interviewees. The range of English language skills needed by LBOTE teachers was identified by our cohort of student interviewees as including:

- becoming familiar with colloquial language and the Australian idiom - both with respect to their fellow (local) students and with respect to their practicum pupils
- the academic English demands of their course, and
- differences of accent and pronunciation.

Our academic interviewees identified as issues:

- functional English
- the technical language of the discipline
- academic English
- the spoken and written language demands of the profession in general
- the everyday language of the pupils in school classrooms
- the ability to be able to transform subject knowledge into language that is understandable by their pupils.

In terms of coping with the academic demands of the course itself, Woodrow's (2006) work suggests a minimum IELTS score of 7 might be useful for courses in teacher education. This reflects studies which show that it is at lower levels of performance on the IELTS that English proficiency influences academic performance (eg Elder, 1993b; Woodrow, 2006). However, given that communicative competence is a core issue within the teacher education course itself, the issue of language testing for students is not just one of entry-level ('Do they have an IELTS score that suggests they can cope with the academic language demands of the course?'). The course which these students undergo itself focuses on language demands in teaching – providing clear explanations, for example, as part of pedagogy. The issue is, then, above all, a question of exit-level competence ('Do they have a level of ease with the language that allows them to meet the demands of teaching? Can they use a range of language strategies to enhance pedagogy?').

Hence, language growth during the course itself may be a more central issue here than it is in some other professional areas. This suggests that if LBOTE students are to be allowed access to shorter courses (such as one-year Diplomas), then their entry level IELTS score should be at the level required by the relevant teacher registration authority. Though IELTS – or any language test - is not meant to be a predictor of academic success, since so many other factors are important, the findings of Elder (1993b), Woodrow (2006) and Bayliss and Ingram (2006) which suggest IELTS scores can be an indicator of short term performance (Elder, 1993b, pp 78-80), give some weight to the notion that



in shorter teacher education courses, IELTS scores could be higher than in longer courses. This is a question of the opportunity which students have on graduation to find employment and the role which universities and teacher education programs have in contributing to that opportunity when accepting students. In Australia, this suggests mandating a range of IELTS '7'-'8' on entry, depending on the relevant state and territory requirements for specific bands, despite Feast's (2002) findings that this may lead to high rates of exclusion of those international students on student visas in shorter graduate entry courses.

On the other hand, some academics believed that the teacher registration scores are higher than they needed to be, arguing that a threshold score such as IELTS '6.5' overall, which they felt suggested an ability to cope with the academic language demands of the course, was adequate, because the issues students faced within the course (such as on practicum) were problems such as a clash of educational cultures and were often hidden under a banner of 'language problems'. For these academics, higher IELTS entry scores would not address the familiarisation and acculturation issues that could only be addressed in the course itself.

One of the Faculties included here had a specific minimum course length requirement for LBOTE students (who in this case were on student visas), which was longer for these students than for local students or for students with higher IELTS scores. This allowed them to focus on language growth as well as other issues for LBOTE students, such as familiarisation with Australian schooling cultures. Such an approach then depends, of course, on specific programs being in place for these students in order to support them towards such growth, which was certainly the case in this Faculty. Such specially designed support programs have been shown to assist students (Weisz and Nicolettou, 2004). Obviously then, universities need to be prepared to invest adequately in the course preparation and school familiarisation necessary for these students to succeed. Programs in this particular Faculty included both language and acculturation support. Previous literature has identified the need for such multifaceted support and in that aspect which is focused on language, it should ideally address both areas of Elder's 'desirable features of teacher communication' and of her and Ellis' 'inventory of typical teacher tasks'. The inventory of tasks suggest the contexts around which such support could be structured and the 'desirable features' suggest the qualities to be aimed for in pursuing the tasks. Extending communicative competence into important areas of pedagogical usage, such as clarity of explanations, should also be the aim of such programs (Viète, 1998, p 172; Ryan and Viète, 2009). Ultimately, as Elder argues (1993b, p 88), entry level thresholds regarding English language proficiency should be set by universities in accordance with their capacity to provide such support. Addressing the range of unfamiliar cultural contexts – above all, local schooling cultures - probably involves a gradual introduction to practicum (Spooner-Lane *et al*, 2007) and to local schooling cultures, mentor training in schools and a targeted practicum experience involving much structured reflection. The importance of mentor training in schools was stressed by our academic interviewees as part of their view that schools needed to recognise their joint role in the preparation of LBOTE student-teachers. It is preferable for all support programs – whether focusing specifically on language or on schooling cultures - to be embedded in academic-credit-bearing studies so as not to place an unfeasible burden on teacher education Faculties (Gill, 2007; Skyrme, 2007). It is also preferable for them to be discipline-focused (Carpenter, 2005; Ryan and Viète, 2009).

Language proficiency alone is no guarantee of either success or failure (Cotton and Conrow, 1998; Dooley and Oliver, 2002). Our interviewees emphasised strongly the complex of factors which contributed to success or failure and suggested that in teacher education there is clearly a case for a system of richer testing, such as that discussed by O'Loughlin at Lancaster University (2008) and that may include interviews. Our academic interviewees showed that such measures have foundered in the past in some Faculties over the issue of the burden of workload. This seems a clear case for teacher education Faculties and teacher registration authorities to work together more closely on the issues of entry and exit requirements and ways to share the burden of a richer entry testing regime which

includes, but goes beyond, language testing such as through IELTS. In terms of language testing specifically, the DEOTE instrument pioneered by Viete (1998) would appear to be one such useful instrument for diagnostic entry testing. The form taken by the NSW PEAT instrument which attempts to account for some aspects of context specificity is a useful model for exit testing, though no widely used test as yet would appear to deal in a nuanced way with 'pragmatic or strategic competence such as simplicity and clarity' (Elder, 1994a, p 56). While 'rich' occupation-specific language testing would obviously not want such 'pragmatic or strategic competence' to totally replace the kinds of skills tested by PEAT or ISLPR, exit-level competence could include them, as they are obviously aspects of language use important to teachers and are given emphasis in teacher education programs. Moreover, this would go some way to ensuring 'a reasonable degree of fit between behaviours elicited from candidates in the artificial environment of the test and actual performance in the target domain' (Elder and Brown, 1997, p 77). Any future move which IELTS might consider into teacher-education-specific testing would most usefully include a diagnostic component on entry and 'pragmatic or strategic competence' for exit testing.

This research has shown a strong emphasis being placed by both students interviewed and academics on the importance of listening comprehension, to 'playing the classroom tennis' – that is, being comfortable enough in English to be able to respond reasonably quickly and appropriately in spoken classroom exchange. Writing and speaking and questions-to-be-asked can be prepared in advance, but listening and responding appropriately and 'in time' cannot. Elder has suggested that 'special attention be given to listening scores in selecting applicants for teacher education' (Elder, 1993b, p 83). We would concur and we would point out the tendency revealed in Tables 1, 2 and 3 above for listening to be relatively undervalued in IELTS entry scores (with the ACU, Sydney and Flinders Universities the exceptions). We would also add that listening should be also an area of particular concentration for student support within the course.

Courses do need to deal openly with the perspectives that students bring with them about appropriate teaching practices, where these are markedly different from local pedagogical practices. However, it is true of both LBOTE and native-English-speaking student teachers that their perceptions of teaching are related to how their beliefs about teaching/learning were formed in their schooling (Spooner-Lane *et al*, 2007), and these need to be analysed and critiqued in all cases to develop a deeper awareness of the complexities of teaching and learning. As one interviewee argued, this means making 'our practice a basis of conversations with our students'.

The reverse side of this coin is that courses also need to recognise and build on the funds of knowledge LBOTE students bring with them. Ryan and Viete, as shown earlier (2009, p 304), point to the absence of reciprocity or mutuality in learning across intellectual cultures and to an undervaluing of LBOTE students' knowledge. LBOTE students present opportunities for engaging different educational cultures, intellectual heritages and transnational knowledge networks. A little explored issue in the internationalisation of Australian higher education is the prospect for knowledge exchange using the intellectual resources LBOTE/international students have gained, or have access to, from their homeland. Further research in this area is needed to challenge the construction of LBOTE students, especially from developing countries, as 'deficient' and requiring 'remedial' education. Such research is needed to contribute to the debate over international students' knowledge being ignored. This is not a question of idealistically or simplistically ignoring the reality that students are being asked to teach in schools which are not going to change overnight to accommodate them. It raises questions about how one prepares teachers with a different set of capabilities, needs, demands and social capital from local students. It is partly a question of seeking out the funds of knowledge which they bring with them and inquiring into the pedagogical cultures with which they are familiar in order to ask what those funds of knowledge and what those cultures have to say about the kinds of issues which they face in their teaching – looking, as one of our interviewees argued, 'at linguistic diversity as a benefit rather than a deficit'.

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## APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Rating
DEOTE	Diploma of Education Oral Test of English
DipEd	Diploma of Education
ELTS	English Language Testing Service
GPA	Grade point average
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ISLPR	International Second Language Proficiency Rating
L1	First language
L2	Second, and usually subsequent, languages
LBOTE	Language background other than English
LOTE	Languages other than English
LSP	Language for Specific Purposes
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NSW	New South Wales
NSWDET	New South Wales Department of Education and Training
PEAT	Professional English assessment for teachers
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SOSE	Studies of Society and the Environment
SWA	Semester weighted averages
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (also: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages)
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TRB	Teachers Registration Board
TSE	Test of Spoken English
TWE	Test of Written English
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching







### **3 A multiple case study of the relationship between the indicators of students' English language competence on entry and students' academic progress at an international postgraduate university**

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An investigation into the selection practices and decision making rationales of admissions personnel in an international, postgraduate UK setting and the consequences for borderline non-native English speaking students' academic progress.

#### **ABSTRACT**

There is concern in the UK about declining degree standards due to the impact of internationalisation initiatives upon the expanded taught Masters postgraduate sector. Despite interest in the policy and managerial aspects of internationalisation of higher education, few studies have researched selection procedures that might illuminate current practices.

A case study approach was employed to study student selection in various Masters programmes in a postgraduate UK higher education institution specialising in engineering and management. The research revealed various selection processes in operation, some dependent upon English test scores, others reliant upon expert linguist assessments. There were differences between Schools in entry requirements for NNES students and in selection practices. Whatever the process or requirements, there was substantial support for complex, holistic rationales underlying Course Directors' selection decisions. Course Directors took into consideration academic qualifications and interests, motivation, readiness to adapt to UK HE culture, educational background and work experience.

Course Directors were most concerned about students' writing abilities which were difficult to assess reliably on entry and sometimes this resulted in failure to reach the required standard for the thesis. This impacted upon the workloads of thesis supervisors and cast doubts upon the reliability of entry assessments to predict academic writing abilities in this context.

The academic progress of students with borderline English language skills was followed during the year using several measures. Over half of the group was instructed to revise and resubmit their theses. In general, these students performed in line with their initial borderline status until the end of the year. The initial identification of students as borderline appeared sound whichever method was used to assess their language proficiency.

The unusual aspects of the institutional context and the nature of the enquiry discourage generalisation but offer opportunities for further comparative case study research in contrasting settings.