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<th>Book review [Review of the book <em>One classroom: Many languages: Issues and strategies for teachers</em>, by J. Barnett (Ed.)]</th>
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<td>Ruth Y. L. Wong</td>
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One Classroom – Many Languages: Issues and Strategies for Teachers
Edited by Jenny Barnett, CALUSA (Centre for Applied Linguistics in the University of South Australia), 1993 (117 pp)

Ruth Y. L. Wong

The first section, Cultural variation in the classroom, highlights intercultural factors in classroom processes. Jim Vernon, a secondary school teacher of Social Science and English, provides insights on working with Vietnamese students. He alerts the reader to the fact that the difficulties experienced by these immigrant students are not confined to language and culture alone. Other factors such as disruption in the education process, the psychological trauma experienced in the home country, and physical disorders, all play a part in making language learning that much more difficult for this group of students. Vernon offers practical tips on classroom routines to close the gap between the teacher and the LOTE (Language Other Than English) students.

Next, Veronica Price and Irene Sheath outline the importance of the home language in school-based learning and the ways of supporting its use and making links with the curriculum in order to provide a rich multilingual environment for all students. Some practical suggestions include using peer translators, playing games that require minimal language, and using the tape recorder in a way that is not unlike what we in Singapore primary classrooms do here for a Listening Post activity.

Di McLuckie describes a case study of one child’s behavioural problems, his family relationships, and the interaction between school and parents. This perspective from a school
counsellor’s point of view provides revealing examples of the big gaps of misunderstanding between different cultural groups.

The second section, Teachers working together, offers insights into the various ways that schools, curriculum coordinators and classroom teachers can go about making links with ESL (English as a Second Language) specialist teachers and working with them creatively, sensitively, and effectively. In the face of several problems, Rose Degenhard and Kathleen Ward enthuse and encourage the new teacher not to give up. Rosemary Matwiejczyk and Deborah Rees advocate teacher collaboration and support teaching in the mainstream classroom. On the other hand, both Elizabeth Aird and Jackie Salathe take the opposite stand and give reasons why they think withdrawal classes will benefit these students more. Finally, Jenny Burford offers a unit of work which draws on Aboriginal experience as a resource for all students and demonstrates an approach which can apply equally well to the experience of other cultural groups.

In the third section on Developing inclusive practices, Amelia Angelakis, Jenny Coats and Cheryl Geoghegan stress the importance of taking into account views and beliefs other than the dominant ones, validating them, publicising them, and responding to the needs and aspirations created by them. They protest against discriminatory practices and call for affirmative action for oppressed groups in the school community. Dorothy Hoddinott and Audrey Comish offer suggestions on how inclusivity can be achieved by integrating ESL into the core curriculum.

This book with its simple English makes a handy reference for busy teachers. Those of us who are new to ESL issues might be initially bewildered by the variety of acronyms used in this book to refer to children who learn English as a second language: LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English); LOTE (Language Other Than English); NESB (Non-English Speaking Background). The editor has anticipated this problem, and has provided a glossary of terms for quick reference.

Even though the book is about the multilingual Australian classroom, the Singapore teacher can relate to many of the problems. In our multilingual and multiracial classrooms, we too have children who are limited in their English. It is possible to adapt many of the suggestions offered in this book to help us to cater to the linguistic needs of our pupils. Some of these suggestions which are applicable to all classrooms (monolingual and especially multilingual) would include providing scaffolding, marking written work selectively, providing experiences for talk, and invoking prior knowledge. We should be suitably encouraged that these are the very things that we stress in the training of our teachers for the primary level.

The ultimate message of the book is that as language teachers, our duty is to empower our students – and that is and should be our shared commitment and goal, whether we teach language in Singapore, in Australia, or anywhere else.