TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

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• Changing conceptualisation of ELT

• The global use of English has grown so strongly that it is now a truly international language.

• Need re-think previous categories:
  – Teaching English as a Second versus Foreign language (TESL vs TEFL)
  – Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
  – Increasingly being replaced by TEIL (Teaching English as an International Language)
What is an international language?

A language that is used globally and locally as the unmarked choice of wider communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries

(McKay, 2002)
English as an international language

= The use of English between any two L2 speakers of English as well as between L1 and L2 speakers of English.

• It has many different varieties that are more or less mutually intelligible.

• Institutionalised varieties called “World Englishes”

• Is there one “international English” which all users speak and write? Should there be?
Who are the students of TEIL?

- L2 speakers or “bilingual speakers/users” of English (rather than “non-native speaker”)

- They have different (often more restricted) uses for English than native speakers

- Most cannot be expected to attain “native speaker competence” in English
Who are the teachers?

- Native *and* bilingual speakers of English

- Very important to recognise the advantages of teachers who are bilingual users: they are widely discriminated against in Australia, especially in primary and secondary schools as well as ELICOS centres.
What training should teachers have?

• Sociolinguistics not just linguistics

• An understanding of how students learn English internationally not only how to teach it

• A variety of teaching methods, not just communicative language teaching.
What varieties of English should be taught?

- Need for us to help our students to become more sociolinguistically aware.

- AMEP focused mostly on Australian English

- ELICOS traditionally focused more on British English because of dominance of UK textbooks and examinations.
What should be the content of our curricula?

• Students need to learn not just about how to communicate with native speakers but also other bilingual users of English with a different first language.

• Need much more exposure to use of English as a *lingua franca*

• Need more focus on teaching culture – differences and similarities within and across different countries.
What methods should we use to teach and assess students?

- Too much use of communicative language teaching (CLT), especially the “weak” version (Holliday, 1994) focusing on oral interaction in the classroom.

- Need to foster additive not subtractive bilingualism (“English only spoken in this language centre”?)

- Assessments need to tap our students’ skills to use English for a wide range of purposes with a variety of native and bilingual speakers of English.
How should we evaluate the success of our courses?

• Assessments which focus on using English as an international language

• The extent to which students are able to use English for different purposes with other native and non-native speakers within and beyond Australia
Implications for Australian ELT programs

• Both AMEP and ELICOS program need to foster greater sociolinguistic awareness

• They need to help students become more familiar with the varieties of English and the cultures of people who speak it.

• They need to use assessments which acknowledge this linguistic diversity.

• They need to employ other teaching approaches, not just “weak” CLT.
