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## BOOK REVIEW

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*One Classroom - Many Languages*

*Jenny Barnett (Ed.)*. CALUSA (Centre for Applied Linguistics in the University of South Australia). 1993

Review by **Geoffrey Barter**

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

Described in its introduction as 'a celebration of teachers' insights and experience in working with bilingual primary and secondary students, *One Classroom - Many Languages* is a collection of letters written by ESL teachers in Australia. The letters deal with issues such as: how to work interculturally; how mainstream and ESL teachers can work collaboratively; and how schools can develop policy and practice that respond to the realities of the school community.

While dealing predominantly with problems and strategies involving teaching and learning, the book also looks at a variety of social problems and pressures that migrants may face in a new land. The idea of using letters is particularly effective for dealing with matters such as these, allowing the writer to communicate personally with the reader while presenting the information in a lively, interesting way.

In one letter, a teacher looks at the problem of racism in schools and explains the first obstacle she encountered was that many teachers will simply not admit that racism exists or that they claim it is not their problem. But in a cultural melting-pot such as Australia racial tension is bound to surface. The writer relates an incident of a boy from Zimbabwe telling a

Chinese teacher to go back where she came from. There wouldn't be many people left in Australia if everyone went back to where they came from!

However, the same letter cites examples of increasing racial tolerance and understanding. Students from various ethnic backgrounds go into classes and educate other students about their culture and traditions. A group of Taiwanese students held Chinese cooking classes, demonstrated the use of chopsticks, and talked about the Chinese New Year.

The incredible variety of ethnic backgrounds represented in Australia is amply illustrated by a letter from a teacher at Bankstown Boys' High School in Sydney. Ninety-seven per cent of the students in the school have a language background other than English and 35 mother-tongues are spoken. How about English as a 36th language!?

A letter from a teacher in a school in an economically disadvantaged area explains how the school can act as a support system for students who come from backgrounds of poverty, unemployment, broken families, drug abuse and violence.

A teacher who supports Aboriginal stu-

dents in a multicultural environment explains how the cultural traditions and experiences of Aborigines can be drawn on to produce a unit of work for all students, and how this approach can apply equally to the experience of other ethnic groups.

A letter written by a teacher working closely with Vietnamese students should be of interest to teachers in Thailand, as Thai and

Vietnamese students tend to encounter similar difficulties with the English language, especially regarding pronunciation.

Although this book will be of most interest to ESL teachers in primary and secondary schools, it has something to say to **all** teachers and anyone else involved in the school community.