This journal is a collaborative venture of the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association and the Australian Association for the Teaching of English. This is the second time that the associations have jointly published a journal focused on a major professional initiative. In 2001, a combined edition of *English in Australia and Literacy Learning: the Middle Years* (Doecke and Meiers 2001) provided insights into STELLA (Standards for Teachers of English Language and Literacy in Australia), a three-year research project involving both associations. The associations had previously collaborated to conduct state and national conferences, but the STELLA issue was the first collaborative publication.

This edition brings together many of the major papers presented at the eighth conference of the International Federation for the Teaching of English, held in Melbourne in July, 2003. This international conference had previously been held in Sydney in 1980, and venues for the conferences in the years between were Ottawa, Auckland, New York and Warwick.

The theme of this conference, ‘elsewheres of potential’ (borrowed from Seamus Heaney’s introduction to his translation of *Beowulf*) set the scene for a conference program organised around five major strands. These strands highlighted many of the questions confronting teachers of English and literacy in the present era. The first IFTE conference, held at Dartmouth in 1966, provided a context for fifty educators from the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada to engage in a collaborative working effort to explore issues such as continuity in English, knowledge and proficiency in English, and language standards and attitudes. John Dixon captured some of the experience of that conference in *Growth through English* (1967). Thirty-eight years later, the issues explored at IFTE by over 1200 English educators, from many countries, including South Africa, ranged across issues relating to textual diversity, literacy in a democratic society, 21st Century literacies, English as a global language, and professional identity and change.

In 1980 IFTE at Sydney English as a subject seemed to be unified – unified by something like a grand theory developing from the work of Dixon, Moffett, Barnes and Britton, who attended the conference. Their work had become influential in Australia in the 1970s. English was about ‘growth’, but it was also about the use of language. Australian English teachers were moving away from ‘dummy run exercises’, and beginning to think more about purpose and audience. At this stage, advocacy of practices such as imaginative recreation was seen as cutting edge.

In 2003 there is greater diversity, and no semblance of a unifying theory anymore; English is characterised by diversity, and it is hard to pinpoint any particular theorists whose work holds the subject together. Peter Medway in a recent NATE journal article even suggested that the subject hasn’t been theorised since Britton’s work. New practices in 1980 such as imaginative recreation are now seen as ‘progressive’ and not ‘critical’, and not focused on the constructedness of texts.

This is neither good nor bad, but it is definitely happening quickly, at a speed that may be outpacing change in other curriculum areas. Many of the papers in this collection, for example those from the *Professional Identity and Change* strand, and the papers by Lankshear and Knobel, and Goodwyn highlight some of the challenges. Generational differences have become significant. At IFTE Andy Goodwyn asked the question ‘What happens when we have a generation of teachers who have ONLY known the literacy and literacy-testing regime?’ Knobel and Lankshear pose the question ‘What happens when we have two generations of teachers in staffrooms with absolute ignorance – not the kind of marginalised lack of interest we’ve always had between generations, but real, genuine ignorance – of each others’ popular culture, let alone the popular cultures of their students?’

This journal is structured around the five conference strands, and the writers at IFTE. We asked the co-convenors of the conference to write the foreword and the afterword. Many of the articles were presented as strand keynote papers. Other articles draw together the discussions that took place within the strand working parties. Parallel to the strands, an extensive range of
panels invited conference delegates to make connections with literacy, cultural and political concerns in society as whole. Writers played a big role in this conference, and Ernie Tucker writes about this in ‘Writers at IFTE’.

IFTE in Melbourne was an international conference, and we are pleased that the articles in this journal represent this dimension of the conference. The authors come from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, United States, South Africa, and Mexico.

Brian Cambourne was a keynote speaker in the Literacy for a Democratic Society strand, and in his address he looked, across five millennia, at issues around the relationships between literacy, democracy and power. In her keynote address in this strand, Linda Christensen described how she taught students to become ‘warriors against cynicism and despair’. This section of the journal begins with a summary report from members of the Literacy for a Democratic Society working party.

English as Global Language was a second strand, and this section also provides a short report from the working party. The strand reports draw on all the discussions of the strand working parties, and various papers and workshops that fitted broadly into the strand. They include recommendations and themes that readers may take up in their own professional lives. Alistair Pennycook, a strand keynote speaker, writes about the myth of English as a global language. He argues that the ‘monolithic presence of a language called English and the pluralistic belief in many Englishes are both myths’. Another keynote speaker in this strand, Hilary Janks, writes about the ‘access paradox’. The contradiction of continuing the dominance of a dominant language by providing more people with access to that language, and the perpetuation of marginalisation when students are denied access to this language in a society that values the language. She illustrates this paradox by drawing on South African language in education policies and classroom

spaces in which they are utilised, and the resulting corporeal inscription that produces a ‘schooled’ body.

A fourth strand in the IFTE conference was 21st Century Literacies. This section includes the short script of the multi-voiced report given by members of this strand working party to the final plenary session of the conference. Richard Andrews was a strand keynote speaker, and in his address he argued that we have reached a crossroads in research in the relationship of ICT and literacy development. He raises questions about how best to research the symbiotic relationship between ICT and literacies. David Nettelbeck, another strand keynote speaker, writes about what happens in his classroom as he attempts to reconceptualise what the terms literacy and literacy education mean in a classroom world of laptops, the Internet, on-line resources, and electronic submission of student work. At IFTE, Michele Knobel gave the live presentation of the keynote paper that she and Colin Lankshear co-authored (Colin was on-line from somewhere in the northern hemisphere). In their paper, ‘Planning for Pedagogy for i-mode: from Flogging to Blogging via wi-fi’, they address questions surrounding some of the emerging literacy and cultural practices the seem likely to win and consolidate increasing allegiance from young people in the decade ahead, and the possible implications for school curriculum and pedagogy.

The fifth strand in IFTE was Professional Identity and Change: the Role of English Literacy Educators in the 21st Century. Brenton Doecke, Terry Locke and Anthony Petrofsky write about the discussions that took place within the stand working party around the multi-leveled nature of English teachers’ work. In their essay they aim to reach ‘a better understanding of the issues that collectively we face as a profession without ignoring significant differences between our national settings’. Terry Locke, strand keynote speaker, writes about a series of radical reforms in New Zealand education since the 1980s, and raises issues about professional knowledge and autonomy in ‘an age of increasing outcomes-based education and proliferating standards’. Andrew Goodwyn, also a strand keynote speaker, discusses issues surrounding the definition and control of the school subject English, the rise of literacy, and English teachers as a professional group. Barbara Comber and Barbara Kamler, in a joint keynote presentation, spoke about their research across generations of older and younger teachers. They told both troubling and optimistic research stories from their work, and explore issues of professional identity.
The final section of the journal focuses on the writers at IFTE.

This journal captures some of the richness and diversity of the themes and ideas explored at the IFTE conference. We know that it will be read by members of ALEA and AATE; we hope that it will also be read by members of English and literacy professional associations in many other countries where English is taught. We also hope that it will prompt discussion, and inform the policy and practice of teaching English in many contexts, thus extending the reach of the 2003 IFTE conference into ‘elsewheres of potential’ far beyond what happened on a few wintry July days in Melbourne.

References