Roadmap key to EAL/D teaching

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Vice President

Growing up in Zimbabwe in a bilingual household, emphasis was always placed on education and hard work.

As a second-generation Zimbabwean, my ancestors emigrated from India during its colonial rule as they sought a better and brighter future for the generations to come.

Knowing the sacrifices of the elders in my family and being part of an increasing Indian diaspora helped build the resilience I needed to grapple with the complexities of being a second language speaker.

However, this only alleviated some of the pressures of learning a new language. My initial years at school were challenging as I tried to come to grips with a foreign syntax, pronunciation and different cultural norms.

But things changed in Year 4 when my teacher Miss Cox spent time explaining how certain word patterns worked, explicitly taught me how to create meaningful sentences and also how to have fun with words.

My love of reading in English started with her encouragement and instruction! I always wonder what would have happened had I not had her and the many other brilliant educators whose guidance led to my career pathway in education as a Visual Arts and English EAL/D (English as an additional language or dialect) teacher.

I have provided you with some personal context in order to bring to mind the EAL/D students in your classrooms and the many obstacles they must overcome, without even considering the varying degrees of challenges in schools.

It would be no surprise to our members that recurrent funding for EAL/D students is integral in their progress and attainment.

Unfortunately, the constraints on the one-line budget of schools often means that catering for EAL/D students is often inconsistent and/or non-existent.

Did you know that there are over 600,000 EAL/D students across all years of schooling in Australia? It is a staggering figure and one that causes concern when we cannot provide ongoing EAL/D support.

So, who are our EAL/D students? According to Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA), “they are newly arrived and Australian-born migrant- background students, refugee students (some with little or no previous formal schooling), international students with age-equivalent education, some Pacifica students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak traditional Aboriginal languages, creoles and/ or newly emerging contact language/ dialects, and who have varying degrees of exposure to Standard Australian English”.

ACTA represents state and territories associations of EAL/D educators.

ACTA has released its National Roadmap for EAL/D Education in schools. The

roadmap provides directions for COVID- 19 recovery and reform.

ACTA president Dr Anne Keary said: “As Australia emerges from the pandemic and reopens to the world, national action is urgently needed to restore our former leading role in teaching English to English language learners.”

ACTA’s roadmap states that: “For beginner or near beginner learners, achieving basic fluency in spoken English in immersion contexts typically takes about two years.”

“However, a minimum of five to seven years is generally required to achieve the necessary English language and literacy skills for comparable academic performance with English speaking peers.”

For our Indigenous EAL/D learners, particularly in remote communities where young people tend not to use English outside school for other purposes, there is a need for “two-way bilingual and bicultural learning with a strong emphasis on grounding English literacy in fluent and meaningful spoken English.”

In metropolitan areas, forms of creole and newly emerging contact varieties are the starting point for developing proficiency in the Standard Australian English of the curriculum.

With the knowledge of all this, it is extremely concerning that within all education sectors in Australia there has been a downsizing of administration to support and advice to schools with EAL/D learners.

The roadmap highlights that “the widespread erosion of EAL/D service provision coincides with the persistent stagnation in Australia’s overall student performance in literacy as measured on NAPLAN and the steady decline internationally as measured by literacy tests, PIRLS and PISA.”

This, accompanied by the ever-increasing inequity in funding between state and private schools, is leaving many of our public schools at a social and educational disadvantage.

Funding cuts in public education has been to the detriment of EAL/D learners, as schools grapple with budget constraints to deliver whole school programs.

The roadmap proposes 12 key action points that are aligned to the directions and initiatives of the National Schools Reform Agreement.

Support students, student learning and student achievement

1. Restore adequate needs-based funding for migrant, refugee and Indigenous English language learners.

2. Upgrade EAL/D teaching and learning resources in the Australian curriculum.

3. Leverage quality bilingual, bi-literacy education to improve Indigenous students’ achievement in remote school communities.

4. Guarantee education, training
and employment pathways for educationally vulnerable Indigenous, migrant and refugee youth.

Support teaching, school leadership and school improvement

5. Equip all pre-service teachers to cater for EAL/D learners in their classrooms.

6. Revive specialist EAL/D teacher education programs.

7. Rebuild EAL/D professional learning, leadership and school development.

8. Institute systematic, national, evidence-based teacher workforce planning that includes EAL/D specialist teachers.

9. Fast track post-pandemic EAL/D pedagogies of recovery.

Enhancing the national evidence base

10. Implement a nationally agreed measure and method of reporting English language proficiency.

11. Ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of English language proficiency loading.

12. Review reporting, accountability and implementation of international student programs in Australian schools.

ACTA has reached out to us to discuss their findings in their report. We look forward to meeting with them and hope that this will help target some of the necessary changes that need to happen within the field of teaching English as an Additional Language or Dialect.

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