Submission to the Senate Select Committee on School Funding

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My input to the Committee is specifically in response to the following inquiry terms:
a) the implementation of needs-based funding arrangements, from 1 January 2014, for all schools and school systems, including:
   iv) the consequential equity of educational opportunity between states and territories, schools and students

b) how funding arrangements will meet the needs of all schools and individual students, specifically Indigenous students and students with limited English

Introduction

About a third of our students in Australia speak English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD). In some schools, in urban Sydney and Melbourne and remote Queensland, NT and Western Australia, 100% of the school population is EALD students. The proportion of EALD students in our schools is growing – not declining.

EALD students are defined by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) as:

- overseas- and Australian-born students whose first language is a language other than English

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose first language is an Indigenous language, including traditional languages, creoles and related varieties, or Aboriginal English

Cognitively, these learners are the most advantaged in our schools. They are bilingual. Bilingual brains are more flexible, more creative, and better at problem solving. However, the potential of many of these clever children is squandered – and schools and educational bureaucracies must bear much of the responsibility for this waste.

Many of these EALD students, particularly indigenous children and children from refugee backgrounds, occupy Australia's long tail of underachievement which is bleakly obvious in our national NAPLAN results as well as in the international PISA results. These students are often operating at a level two to three years below their peers.

And it has been this way for decades. We have NEVER done this well.

How is it that we fail so many clever children? Why can't our schools make the most of their potential?

I propose two main reasons for our country's failure to make the most of the potential of these students – both reasons speak to the terms of reference for this inquiry.

1. **Systems misdirect their school funding through a fundamental misunderstanding of student needs**

Many principals – and systems – make the mistake of assuming that 'good literacy teaching' will meet the needs of EALD students and they focus their staffing and professional development around literacy. However, language and literacy are NOT the same thing. Language is the requisite tool of literate behaviour. EALD students require a strong foundation in English language if they are to benefit from the many literacy activities their teachers plan.

2. Lack of teacher professional knowledge of language and linguistics

Teaching is most effective when we establish what students know and do and build upon that. However, very few teachers or Principals in Australia are trained in second or additional language acquisition and so they find it very challenging to plan effective learning for EALD students. Most mainstream teachers are native English speakers, and usually monolingual, so the system behind the English language is 'invisible' to them – making it very hard for them to teach the English language system explicitly to EALD learners.

Discussion

1. Systems misdirect their school funding through a fundamental misunderstanding of student needs

When funding is delivered at a school or system level, Principals are left with the responsibility to distribute the funds so they meet the needs of learners in their schools. In the ACT where Principals have some autonomy over their staffing points, there is ample evidence from the profession that funds for EALD learners are funneled into general literacy programmes – following the logic that good literacy programmes will benefit all learners, including EALD learners. This is not the case. Indeed some schools in the ACT use the staffing points that these learners generate to reduce class sizes. This may provide some benefits to the school in general – but in no way addresses the EALD students specific language learning needs.

In a recent survey of EALD teachers, one teacher described the circumstances in her school

> *'The common use of EALD teachers as group work teachers to make smaller maths or literacy groups for mainstream classes often leads to the EALD teacher not working with the students most in need and not giving them specific EALD support. Some teachers have been given groups purely for behaviour management, groups without EALD students etc. It is often the EALD teacher who becomes the relief teacher when mainstream teachers are absent.'*

In some schools EALD and "Learning Assistance" students (also known as "special needs" students) are being combined into one learning group. Placing these students, whose learning needs are quite distinct, in an undifferentiated "remedial" group is entirely retrograde—a return to the discredited practices of the 1950s and '60s.

The result is that struggling students are not given the specialist support they require. The evidence is overwhelming that learners benefit from expert language teaching and support. Where English is required for participation in mainstream education and society, as in Australia, gaps are highly likely to emerge when this support is absent.

2. Teachers with specialist knowledge of second language acquisition

Qualified, knowledgeable and committed EALD teachers are fundamental to the effective delivery of EALD tuition and other learning support. These teachers also play key advocacy and policy-informing roles in schools. Since this role includes advising and team teaching with other teachers, the demands on EALD teachers' ability to work closely with colleagues and to understand other subject areas are higher than is normally expected for regular classroom teachers. EALD teachers working with older students need a range of pedagogic expertise spanning pre-literacy skills to English for academic study. In responding to students who have suffered or are suffering trauma, EALD teachers need to develop extensive community and agency networks in order to assist their students, refer them appropriately and interact with families, guardians and other community supports. The table in Appendix 1 was developed by the Australian Council of TESOL Associations and illustrates the fundamental differences between literacy and EALD and the importance of specialist teachers for EALD learners.

This short article written for The Conversation outlines these challenges with some specific examples. https://theconversation.com/lost-for-words-why-the-best-literacy-approaches-are-not-reaching-the-classroom-19561

Recommendations

A student-based funding model is required, where the funding is attached to the identified students and the schools are directly accountable for the learning outcomes of those identified students. This would ensure the money was being spent where the money is intended.

A student-based funding model has two important co-requisites:

I. An effective model for identifying eligible students. Currently the suggested description is 'limited English proficiency' so there must be **a national definition of 'limited English proficiency'.**

II. **Teachers with specialist knowledge of second language acquisition** to teach EALD learners and support mainstream teachers address the language learning needs of these learners (see Section 2 of the Discussion above)

I. A national definition of 'limited English proficiency'.

A new national description of how English Language Learning progesses – ratified by all State and Territory ministers - could serve as the tool for assigning funding to students based on need. The English Language Learning Progression (ELLP) describes four stages of language learning: Beginning, Emerging, Developing and Consolidating. http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/English_as_an_Additional_Language_or_Dialect_Teacher_Resource_05_06_12.pdf

NSW DET conducted a major evaluation of the ELLP and found it to be a valid and reliable measure of English language learning, that is easily administered by teachers.

II. Teachers with specialist knowledge of second language acquisition

Qualified, knowledgeable and committed EALD teachers are fundamental to the effective delivery of EALD tuition and other learning support. Just as important are mainstream teachers who can manage the specific language learning needs of EALD

students. There must significant professional development for teachers to build their skills in this area.

Summary

In summary, The Melbourne Declaration has an inarguable vision for education in Australia with two major goals. Firstly, that Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence and, secondly, that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

Until we change the way in which we work with EALD students we will have no impact upon declining standards and our growing achievement gap – and we will continue to waste the wonderful potential of these children. School funding should be attached to students and not to schools or programmes where history shows us the results are diffused, and money intended for the most needy is funneled elsewhere.

Appendix 1

	Literacy-Focussed Approaches	EAL/D Approaches
Language versus literacy as the focus of pedagogy and assessment.	Focus is predominantly on reading & writing.	Starting point is a comprehensive assessment of the learner's knowledge of the English language, including listening & speaking.
	Failure to perform within age-related norms is seen as problematic and requiring some form of remediation.	Learners who do not meet mainstream benchmarks are not seen as "underperforming". Teaching addresses what is possible for each stage in language learning, which is quite different from remedial literacy teaching.
	Learners' failure to achieve benchmarks/standards is interpreted with reference to the class/social/home factors that support literacy learning.	Class/social/home factors are taken into account in EAL/D approaches. But learning another language is also recognised as entailing specific cognitive tasks that do not apply in learning one's first language.
		Cross-cultural learning is an important focus for EAL/D approaches. This learning is not equated with class-based identity issues.
Learners' age	Literacy guidelines, descriptions of development, teaching resources and content assume that beginning literacy learners are young and beginning school.	Age-related learning levels, needs, interests and aspirations cannot be assumed. EAL/D approaches take account, for example, of: (1) both younger and older learners with/without spoken English (2) both younger and older learners with or without previous literacy skills in their home language; (3) older learners with little/no previous schooling, or severely disrupted schooling.
Spoken English	Teaching assumes learners' prior use & comprehension of age-appropriate spoken English.	Learners may have little or no comprehension of spoken English and may not be able to speak English. Teaching may need to begin by developing learners' English listening and speaking.
	Teaching assumes that, as English users, learners can distinguish & produce English sounds. The teaching focus is on relating known sounds to letters (by whatever method).	EAL/D teaching includes attention to discriminating and producing English sounds (e.g. /p/ versus /b/). The learner must acquire a new repertoire of sounds.
Command	Teaching assumes that	EAL/D approaches take explicit account of

	Literacy-Focussed Approaches	EAL/D Approaches
of reading & writing.	learners lack skills in reading and writing because they lack these skills in English.	learners' development in reading and writing skills in other languages or varieties. Some learners will have highly developed literacy skills (but not in English). Teaching utilises these skills. EAL approaches consider whether or not learners are familiar with Roman or non-Roman scripts, and vary accordingly. In contrast, some older EAL refugee students with little/no previous schooling (some of whom have come from a totally non-print based environment) may require a more fundamental orientation to school learning, including print and texts, than any of their age-related peers with previous schooling (e.g. they may need to learn how to orientate a book or hold a pencil; understand a numbered sequence; use scissors).
Content and cultural assumptions	Content of resources and tests frequently assume that learners: understand & conform to peer group norms of urban Australian-born students; live in a nuclear family; have experienced continuous schooling (even if not successful) from a young age; are monolingual and live in an English monolingual world.	EAL/D approaches always proceed from an understanding of cultures and languages as intertwined, and therefore that there are radical differences in people's cultural assumptions and life experiences. EAL/D approaches and content take account of the fact that some learners may have little/no experience of urban Australian culture. EAL/D content is sensitive to family structures that are very different from traditional Western norms. EAL/D approaches cannot assume that learners live with their parents or indeed any family. EAL/D teaching may need to be attuned to other expertise in dealing with trauma and torture. EAL/D approaches do not assume a monolingual English world but rather understand and value the cognitive, social and personal advantages of bi/multilingualism.
	If Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders are considered, content and resources frequently (and wrongly) assume that only in remote locations do Aboriginal people have	EAL/D approaches explore (rather than assume) the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences between Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander groups in urban, rural and remote locations, and in different regions of Australia.

	Literacy-Focussed Approaches	EAL/D Approaches
	distinctive cultures, languages and English varieties.	
	If the values embedded in texts are explored, students' starting point for the exploration is taken for granted (as just outlined above). The aim is often to question, disrupt or criticise this starting point.	A starting point for EAL/D approaches is to assess the cultural assumptions in texts and to explore how these may be alien for students. In the process of engaging with a text, explicit attention is paid to building bridges between learners' cultural understandings and that text.
	In so far as literacy approaches take account of values in relation to older students' non-engagement with texts, they tend to assume that problems result from students' alienation from literacy practices and education.	Rather than being alienation from literacy and learning, EAL/D learners are generally highly motivated to gain literacy and an education, although they can become disillusioned by repeated failures to meet their learning needs. When combined in classes with students alienated from literacy and education, ESL students can be confused, shocked and disgusted by other students' behaviour. Rather than dealing with problems of alienation, EAL/D approaches support learners in their desire to participate in schooling and the wider society. They locate the learning of standard Australian English in the context of citizenship, multiculturalism, ethnic identity and language/dialect maintenance.
	Literacy approaches do not pay sufficient attention for EAL/D learning needs in relation to the links between language forms and subject matter/content.	EAL/D approaches recognise that content is linguistically embedded and that teaching must explicitly address how content takes shape in, is shaped by, and expressed through English language forms. EAL/D pedagogy has developed a variety of sophisticated approaches that integrate content with English learning, allowing attention to subject matter, the forms of English, and discourse patterns and possibilities (e.g. English for academic purposes; English for new arrivals; the topic approach; genre approaches).