

## AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF TESOL ASSOCIATIONS

Follow-up to the meeting of National Schools Reform Agreement Ministerial Reference Group, Hobart 6 October 2023

ACTA welcomes our inclusion in the Ministerial Reference Group to identify solutions for creating a Better and Fairer Education System. However, the wide-ranging discussion in the Hobart meeting obviously allowed only limited time to consider the fundamental concepts that were central in our formal submission to the review. The following table lists the four key concepts that were mentioned by many speakers in Hobart which we would like to clarify and elaborate, and propose proven solutions, cross-referenced to our original submission (attached for easy reference).

FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS	ISSUES THAT MUST BE ADDRESSED	PROVEN SOLUTIONS FOR A BETTER & FAIRER EDUCATION SYSTEM
<p>EALD learning and learners (see ACTA submission Policy Questions 1, 4 &amp; 5, Appendices A &amp; B: pp. 4-8; 17-19; 20-21; 22-26)</p>	<p>Learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) enter Australian schools at all year levels with a home language and cultural system that is still developing yet are taught almost exclusively in English. The current NSRA includes loadings for English proficiency (EP) and Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander students, but do not adequately capture the number and extent of EALD student need because:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the EP loading is based on enrolment data that identifies “language background other than English’ (LBOTE) combined with parents’ highest education level (below Year 9). This (i) conflates EAL/D learners with fluent (even monolingual) English speakers whose parents speak a language other than English, (ii) permits inaccurate self-identification, (iii) promotes mis-assessment of EAL/D learners as having English literacy problems (e.g. as in NAPLAN data) and/or cognitive or physical disabilities (e.g. over-represented in referrals for speech language and learning support) and/or as socioeconomically disadvantaged.</li> <li>Indigenous EAL/D learners are excluded from EP funding and the Aboriginal &amp; Torres Strait Islander loading does not provide for students from remote communities for whom English is a <u>foreign</u> language.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A <b><u>specific EAL/D learner identifier</u></b> that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English language &amp; literacy proficiency levels</li> <li>languages other than English spoken</li> <li>previous formal schooling</li> </ul> </li> <li>The EAL/D identifier should be linked with a <b><u>required level of support</u></b> to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a specialist EAL/D program taught by specialist EAL/D teachers</li> <li>specialist EAL/D curriculum &amp; teaching resources</li> <li>knowledgeable mainstream teacher support</li> <li>bilingual teaching &amp; resources where feasible &amp; appropriate.</li> <li>other required support (e.g. counsellors for torture &amp; trauma, interpreters, parent liaison)</li> </ul> </li> <li><b><u>Funding tied to support should be accountable</u></b> for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learning outcomes from named EAL/D programs, including progress in EAL/D, using evidence-based benchmarks</li> <li>quality assurance criteria for EAL/D provision</li> <li>public reporting to school Councils, jurisdictions &amp; the Commonwealth.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>
<p>Concentrations of disadvantage (see ACTA submission Policy Question 2 &amp; Appendix A: pp.9-13, 23-25) and Note 1 below.</p>	<p>EAL/D students are inherently <i>advantaged</i> by having (an)other language(s) and cultural resources, but the medium of instruction in Australian schools is Standard Australian English which <i>creates</i> disadvantage if English language learning is not supported. Schools often operate as if all students enter school with a level of spoken English, including control of English sounds, vocabulary, grammar and genres, commensurate with their age. Yet EALD students have to learn new curriculum content in a language they are not yet proficient in, at the same time learn English, which often creates a barrier to successful academic outcomes.</p> <p>Support must target both learner strengths and the different needs of those literate in one or more languages other than English, those with minimal/no previous schooling and little/no literacy in another language, those who have experienced war/trauma</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The provision of <b><u>specialist EALD teachers &amp; programs</u></b> in the early stages of learning English that is targeted to students’ existing language(s) and literacy knowledge (and which builds English literacy from developing spoken English), and bilingual/bi-literacy programs, resources and/or support teachers as feasible and appropriate</li> <li><b><u>Specialist/informed EAL/D teaching for up to 7-10 years</u></b>, depending on students’ prior experiences of learning English and their home situation with an ongoing explicit focus on spoken and written English in all subject areas (not just English). All teachers need the knowledge and skills to make visible the language structures and features of their subject, and teachers responsible for the teaching of literacy need to know how to build</li> </ol>

	and those from isolated regional and remote areas, in particular remote Indigenous language speaking students.	oral English language skills as well as vocabulary and grammar in conjunction with the teaching of reading and writing. 3. Easy access to <b><u>multilingual counsellors and other support staff</u></b> able to work with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as required.
Positive well-being for learning (see ACTA submission Policy Question 2: pp. 9 -13, esp. paras. 4.9-4.10) and Note 2. below	The ability to maintain and develop the main language(s) spoken at home as well as communicate effectively in English is crucial to an EALD student's identity and wellbeing, yet too often multilingualism is not valued or supported in schools. Stigmatisation of home languages and/or loss of language proficiency can progressively undermine children's self-esteem and important family and community relationships. This is especially the case for remote Indigenous language speaking students whose home languages are under threat, leading to loss of cultural identity and overall societal well-being.	<b><u>1. Greater recognition and valuing of the variety of languages Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples use</u></b> (Traditional and contemporary (home) languages) which will contribute to truth telling and healing. <b><u>2. Home language maintenance and development, including bilingual/biliteracy programs</u></b> in Indigenous communities where English is a foreign language
Cultural responsiveness (see ACTA submission Policy Question 2: p. 12, para. 2; pp. 14-15, paras. 7.4, 7.6, 8.3; Appendix A, paras 3.1-3.4)	Language is a critical component of cultural responsiveness – if a student does not understand English they will not know their Australian teacher (or curriculum) is trying to be culturally responsive. Cultural responsiveness is also tokenistic if students' home languages, including creoles and dialects, and English learning needs are not supported.	In addition to cultural capability development and anti-racism education for all educators and schools, and the provision of culturally responsive pedagogies, <b><u>culturally responsive teaching must include critical attention to the role of language</u></b> – both as medium of schooling and as expression of identity – as indicated above.

Note 1: On the use of the term disadvantage, in relation to the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the peak Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting (IECM) stated to a recent Parliamentary inquiry: see the [Submission 52 - Indigenous Education Consultative Meeting \(IECM\) - National School Reform Agreement - Commissioned study \(pc.gov.au\)](#), p. 3:

We wholeheartedly reject language of 'disadvantage' in reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. This labelling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families as disadvantaged continues to play into a culture of deficit discourse and low expectations that stymie Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' ability to thrive in their education. Our students are not the problem – the system is failing them. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities face a range of complex and compounding circumstances that impact their educational engagement and outcomes, they are not inherently disadvantaged by being Indigenous. We commend the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students knowing their culture, language and identity. The power of being able to walk strong in two worlds.

ACTA believes this statement applies in force to all EAL/D learners.

Note 2: On healthy well-being, see the *2020 Parliamentary Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments*, p. 84. [Remote education full report.pdf \(aph.gov.au\)](#): "There is increasing recognition that being strong in language and culture are protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's health and well-being, and support mainstream educational attainment," and the findings of the *2020 National Indigenous Languages Report, Office for the Arts, p.9*

1. Language is a fundamental part of Indigenous culture and identity, even for those who do not speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a range of different relationships to language—from those who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language as their first language to those who are learning a language as part of revival efforts.
3. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, traditional and new, provide significant social and economic benefits to their speakers, including income-generating and employment opportunities.
4. Speaking language has demonstrated benefits for individual well-being and health, particularly mental health. Speaking language is also beneficial in learning context.

ACTA believes this statement applies in force to *all* EAL/D learners.