

ACTA Conference-Shaping the Future Oct 1-3, 2026 - Symposium

Fading Footprints: Tracing EAL/D Teaching Courses at Australian universities and investigating the state of EAL/D education in Australian schools

Time: 80 mins (3 x 20 mins and 20 mins Q & A)

Chair: Toni Dobinson, Curtin University

Overview:

Conversations with key practitioners and leaders in the field of TESOL in Australia have raised the issue of why universities are not preparing Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students for the demands of teaching EAL/D students in schools. In line with media announcements (Bulter, 2022; Neilsen & Weinmann, 2022; The Educator, 2022; Steele, 2023), practitioners and leaders have drawn attention to the chronic shortage of teachers emerging with EAL/D qualifications or even knowledge gained from single units of study relevant to teaching multilingual migrant or international students across Australia. Our colloquium focuses on a project funded by the Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) in 2023 to address these issues. It involved the gathering of quantitative, audit and qualitative data from TESOL stakeholders and university websites across the nation from 2024-2025 and included a second national survey conducted to identify further impacts and trends since 2016. It garnered evidence from interviews and audit material to advocate for the revitalisation of ITE courses in response to the dire need for pedagogically equipped EAL/D teachers for multilingual and multicultural practice. Findings from the study are reported here in three presentations.

Biography



Toni Dobinson is a Professor in the Discipline of Applied Linguistics in the School of Education at Curtin University, Western Australia. She has been an ESOL/EALD teacher and researches in the areas of language teacher education, language and identity, language and social justice, translingual practices and translingual discrimination. She has worked and collaborated extensively on critical participatory action research projects in migrant and refugee communities and multilingual schools in local areas of Western Australia, as well as a remote school in the Kimberley.

Presentation 1 (25 mins)

Title: *Faded footprint? The state and fate of EAL/D education in Australian schools.*

Michael Michell University of NSW
Margaret Turnbull University of Wollongong
Kim Andreassen Curtin University

In December 2024, the *Fading Footprints* research project conducted a national survey of EAL/D education in Australian schools to ascertain the current health of EAL/D programs in Australia and identify trends from the 2016 ACTA 'State of EAL/D Education in Australia' survey. The survey received a total of some 400 quantitative and qualitative responses from educators across all Australian state and territory education systems. This presentation will report on the views of EAL/D teachers and teacher educators, system and school leaders and mainstream teachers of EAL/D learners regarding the current state of EAL/D education. Specifically, it will present their views in relation to EAL/D resourcing and accountability; EAL/D teaching support; EAL/D leadership; targeted school EAL/D programs; EAL/D teacher education and professional development, and national policy. It will also consider how EAL/D teachers' work roles have changed under school autonomy reform policies since 2016. Survey analysis and findings highlight the experiences and concerns of EAL/D teachers working in schools under school autonomy regimes affecting their ability to meet the English language learning needs of their EAL/D students and reflecting systemic erosion of EAL/D programs in schools. Implications for policy advocacy on the national role and status of EAL/D education will be discussed with reference to future reform efforts and system-level improvements to help create a better and fairer education system for all students under the Commonwealth's *Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (2025-2034)*.

Biographies



Michael Michell is an honorary lecturer in languages and literacy education at the UNSW School of Education. Previously, he worked as an ESL teacher and consultant in the NSW Department of Education leading ESL assessment, curriculum, research and professional learning projects and policy development.



Margaret Turnbull is an associate lecturer and doctoral student at the University of Wollongong. She is currently working as a language and literacy advisor to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).



Kim Andreassen (they/them) is a School Program Coordinator for Act Belong Commit and PhD Candidate at Curtin University and an educational sexologist.

Presentation 2 (25 mins)

Title: *How do Australian universities prepare pre-service teachers to teach EAL/D to multilingual learners in Australian classrooms?*

Carly Steele Curtin University

Julian Chen Curtin University

Marisa Schiavi Catholic Education Western Australia

Belinda Stewart Cyril Jackson Senior Campus

Framed by social justice perspectives, we present our findings from an audit of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs offered by Australian universities (see article in the Special Issue of *TESOL in Context*, 33/2, 2025). The purpose was to establish which degrees (and universities) offered dedicated English as an Additional Language and/or Dialect (EAL/D) units that explicitly and solely focused on EAL/D learning and teaching, either as core or elective units, or as a specialisation for secondary ITE courses. To do this, we analysed the publicly available unit titles and descriptions on university websites for 37 Australian universities, representing 215 undergraduate and postgraduate ITE degrees in early childhood, primary and secondary education offered in 2024 and the beginning of 2025. The data were categorised using an EAL/D unit identification tool that we developed. Our findings show that while some universities are preparing teachers to support the EAL/D learners in their classrooms, many are not. This is tied to the accreditation process for ITE degrees and the role that the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) teacher standards play. Given the clear need, this lack of recognition and failure to adequately allocate resources towards meeting the needs of EAL/D learners is a social justice issue, and we end with a plea for change in this area.

Biographies



Carly Steele is a Senior Lecturer and Master of Education Course Coordinator at Curtin University. An applied linguist and qualified teacher, she has over 12 years' experience across diverse educational contexts in Australia.



Julian Chen (they/them) is an Associate Professor, applied linguist, seasoned researcher, and course coordinator of Asian Languages at the School of Education, Curtin University.



Belinda Stewart

Belinda works to further opportunities for EAL/D students through her roles as deputy principal of the Cyril Jackson Senior Campus Intensive English Centre and current president of WATESOL.



Marisa Schiavi leads the EAL/D and Languages portfolios at CEWA. She has extensive experience across multicultural and multilingual, national and international educational contexts.

Presentation 3 (25 mins)

Title: *Limitations, affordances and recommendations in EAL/D education in Australia*

Toni Dobinson Curtin University
Leonardo Veliz University of New England
Stephanie Dryden Curtin University
David Partridge University of New England

A national survey report by the Australia Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA, 2014) showed that there was reduced systemic support for EAL/D provision, insufficient consideration of EAL/D learners, and the demands of learning an additional language/dialect were greatly underestimated (p. 4). These findings were repeated in the 2016 survey (ACTA, 2022, p. 17; see also Creagh et al., 2022). One of the main aims of our project was to collect qualitative data to complement the survey data and address the question: What are the views of EAL/D teachers, teacher educators, system and school leaders and mainstream teachers of EAL/D learners on the current state of EAL/D education with regard to resourcing and accountability; teaching support; leadership; targeted school programs; teacher education, professional development and national policy? This third part of our symposium focuses on the prevailing themes apparent in the one-on-one interviews of over 25 practitioners, school leaders and academics in different states across Australia. Major themes included institutional limitations/ affordances and recommendations for teacher education. Within these sub-themes were the impact of top-down Department of Education (and university) mandates, lack of university provision of EAL/D units, appropriateness of content in courses and policy changes needed to ensure systematicity and consistency of EAL/D delivery

Biographies



Toni Dobinson is a Professor in the Discipline of Applied Linguistics in the School of Education at Curtin University, Western Australia and researches in the area of sociolinguistics.



Leonardo Veliz is an Associate Professor in Language and Literacy in the School of Education, UNE, with research in multilingualism, multiculturalism and EALD pedagogies.



Stephanie Dryden is a Research Officer at Curtin University and Batchelor Institute, in the disciplines of Education and Applied Linguistics. Previously, she was an EAL/D teacher in Australia and overseas.



David Partridge is a EAL/D education educator, casual academic and post graduate student in the School of Education, UNE, researching plurilingual teaching practices.