

Submission to the Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System



*The Association for Language Testing and Assessment
of Australia and New Zealand*

<http://www.altaanz.org>

August 2023

Who is ALTAANZ?

The *Association for Language Testing and Assessment of Australia and New Zealand* (ALTAANZ) promotes best practice in language assessment in educational and professional settings in these two countries and fosters collaborations between academia, schools and other agencies responsible for language testing or assessment. We provide advice on assessment to public and other relevant agencies on assessment-related issues, and advocate on behalf of test-takers, students and other stakeholders whose life chances may be affected by assessment-related decisions. The organisation has over 500 members, most of whom are in Australia and New Zealand and it is affiliated with similar international organisations. ALTAANZ members work and research in contexts where language tests and assessments are used: primary schools, secondary schools, higher education, vocational education, education pathway providers, language testing companies, private language schools and other institutions.

Focus of this submission

As an association with expertise in educational measurement and assessment, ALTAANZ welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper. The focus of our submission is on learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). Although we have responded specifically to Chapter 5, concerning a gap in collecting data about EAL/D learners, we would like to emphasise that English language ability is a critical area of need in Australian education policy because it intersects with (1) achievement across all subject areas, (2) student engagement, (3) emotional and social well-being, and (3) resources and training support for teachers. Therefore, our submission is relevant to many questions, but it responds specifically to Question 27 in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Collecting data to inform decision-making and boost student outcomes

Question 27: Is there any data not currently collected and reported on that is vital to understanding education in Australia? Why is this data important?

National leadership needed on addressing the EAL/D data gap

There is a significant data gap concerning children who are learners of English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D). Students undergoing English-medium schooling in their second language are an equity group who are currently not identified or recognised for their English language support needs in Australian school data. For better and fairer distribution of support across the full EAL/D learner cohort, the new National School Reform Agreement (NSRA) needs to provide clear national leadership and address the EAL/D data gap. Failure to disaggregate this cohort has led to the current unfair situation where EAL/D learners and their classroom learning can be inequitably appraised and treated. This situation cannot, however, be monitored as, currently, EAL/D data is not systematically collected and analysed. Currently,

neither EAL/D learners' academic achievements nor their personal well-being can be correlated with their level of English language learning or EAL/D support provisions.

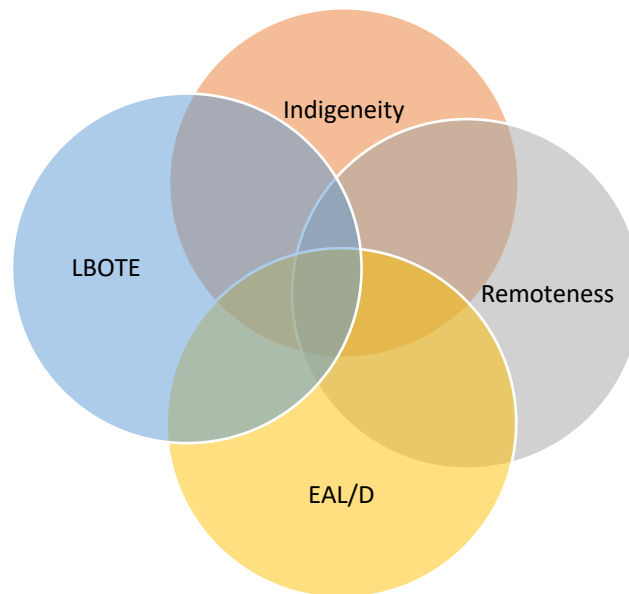
Prioritisation of English language proficiency data

There has been a de-prioritisation of the EAL/D cohort's shared learner characteristic: the amount they have acquired of the English language (EAL/D proficiency levels). The link between student achievement and English language proficiency level is shown in research evidence (see Creagh 2014a; and, for example internationally, Strand & Lindorff 2020). Measures of EAL/D proficiency go directly to EAL/D learners' support needs and so are fundamental for differentiating the level of support they require to access any classroom learning delivered via the English language. Each jurisdiction has an EAL/D proficiency tool (Bandscales, Progress Maps, etc.) which provides straightforward measures of EAL/D proficiency. However, education data collection systems have generally relied on various other demographic data points, such as language background other than English (LBOTE), Indigenous, refugee, visa status, low socio-economic status, remote area, etc., to flag cohorts that might not be experiencing equitable outcomes. None of these represents a categorical learning need which can be addressed directly by teaching it: The English language is fundamental to understanding and achieving in every classroom and every subject area delivered in via this language. The English language can be taught.

The current data points obscure EAL/D learners. Because EAL/D is not disaggregated, for example, in NAPLAN data, other data categories can take on its associations in measurement, but imperfectly. Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE), for example, is unhelpful for guiding education responses because it is such a large and diverse category. It encompasses full English speakers (whose parents speak a language other than English) as well as beginning to advanced English language proficiency levels (see Figure 1). In fact research, has shown that the extreme distributions of those LBOTE students doing well and those not doing well have produced skewed data (Creagh 2014b). LBOTE has been dubbed a category of misrecognition because it is assumed to apply to a cohort (EAL/D learners) when it does not (Lingard et al 2012). In other categories, EAL/D is hidden, for example, Indigenous children in remote communities who are first language speakers of Indigenous language/s and who are learning English upon their entry to schooling (Angelo 2013).

In short, current education data does not identify EAL/D learners and their level of English language proficiency. Some demographic data even gets treated as a proxy or quasi-EAL/D category (perhaps LBOTE, for overseas background learners; maybe remoteness for Indigenous background learners), which is inappropriate and potentially misleading. EAL/D proficiency is the crux of the matter and there are tools to measure it.

Figure 1: EAL/D status intersects with current data points but is a distinct cohort



EAL/D data gap and lack of fair targeted support in schools

The EAL/D data gap means EAL/D learners' achievements cannot be correlated with their EAL/D proficiency levels, nor with any targeted support they might receive. This gives rise to much that is unfair in our schooling systems:

1. Inappropriate assessment and unhelpful interventions

There are profound but inconsistently acknowledged differences between students who already speak English (i.e., as their first language) compared to those students who are in the process of learning English (as a language additional to their first languages). The additional language learning pathway of EAL/D learners is described by EAL/D proficiency tools. Ignoring this key information can lead to inappropriate assessment of EAL/D learners and their classroom learning, and on that ill-informed basis, to unhelpful interventions that misdirect efforts away from learning the English language in a meaningful and supportive context.

2. Lack of fair access to K-10 EAL/D curriculum

The deprioritising of EAL/D data has downgraded EAL/D as a learning area. An obvious result of this "diminishment" is that the Australian Curriculum has not been provided a fit for purpose k-10 EAL/D curriculum which would guide intervention efforts for EAL/D learners. The lack of EAL/D data and the lack of an EAL/D curriculum reinforce each other in a negative feedback loop. As ACARA offers no EAL/D curriculum for this age group there is no flag within the Australian Curriculum offerings that EAL/D learners have a whole extra learning area to acquire, the English language, which impacts on all the other subjects. If EAL/D learners are to access classroom learning independently like students who have spoken English all their lives, then their teachers need a curriculum that shows them what to teach so students develop sufficient English to access the

mainstream curriculum. Victoria has recently developed an EAL/D curriculum to assist mainstream teachers in response to this void.

3. EAL/D proficiency data and fair access to EAL/D resources for all EAL/D cohorts

Different EAL/D cohorts do not have access to the same funding and support services. While some differentiation due to other individual or contextual factors is required, an EAL/D learner at an early EAL/D proficiency level is in need of extensive teacher support to be able to participate (to some extent at least) in classroom learning. It is logical that “better and fairer” schooling would require this, no matter the EAL/D learners’ background. However, currently, there is no national mechanism for channeling an extensive level of support to that section of the broader EAL/D cohort. EAL/D proficiency measures can do this, but they have not been harnessed. EAL/D resourcing provisions across the country differ and eligibility often involves visa status and time of arrival for students newly arrived from overseas (immigrant and refugee), while arrangements for EAL/D learners born in Australia vary greatly. Students’ backgrounds (Indigenous status, ethnicity, country of origin, visa, etc.) do not automatically determine students’ EAL/D learner status, nor can they determine students’ levels of EAL/D proficiency and EAL/D support needs.

4. EAL/D proficiency data and EAL/D learners’ support needs

- 1) There are differences between EAL/D learners’ support needs which hinge directly on their EAL/D proficiency levels. How much English language learning they have internalised across the different macroskills (listening, reading, writing, speaking) determines the level and kinds of support they need to access classroom learning.
- 2) In lieu of national leadership, jurisdictions and sectors have made best-call, but sometimes ad hoc decisions about which EAL/D learners get support, the requirements for EAL/D content taught and feedback and reporting processes to inform EAL/D learners and their families. How these decisions relate to EAL/D proficiency levels and hence learners’ support needs is currently unknown at the national level. This means that EAL/D learners with the same level of need might not get the same level or kinds of support, which is inherently unfair. However, there has been little or no leadership at the national level to ensure a consistent focus on EAL/D learners and their proficiency levels. Most jurisdictions and sectors therefore use proficiency tools and data collection processes which have been developed locally and are embedded in their own systems.¹

The Australian government could bring clarity to national EAL/D learner data (e.g. numbers of students, language backgrounds, levels in macroskills) by collecting data from the States/Territories/Sectors, drawing from their well-established EAL/D data-collection methods using their existing English Language Proficiency (ELP) tools with their current, differing EAL/D cohorts.

¹ The ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression has had limited take up as fit for purpose. Many jurisdictions/sectors have found the ACARA tool less well-suited to their populations and processes, and use their own tools.

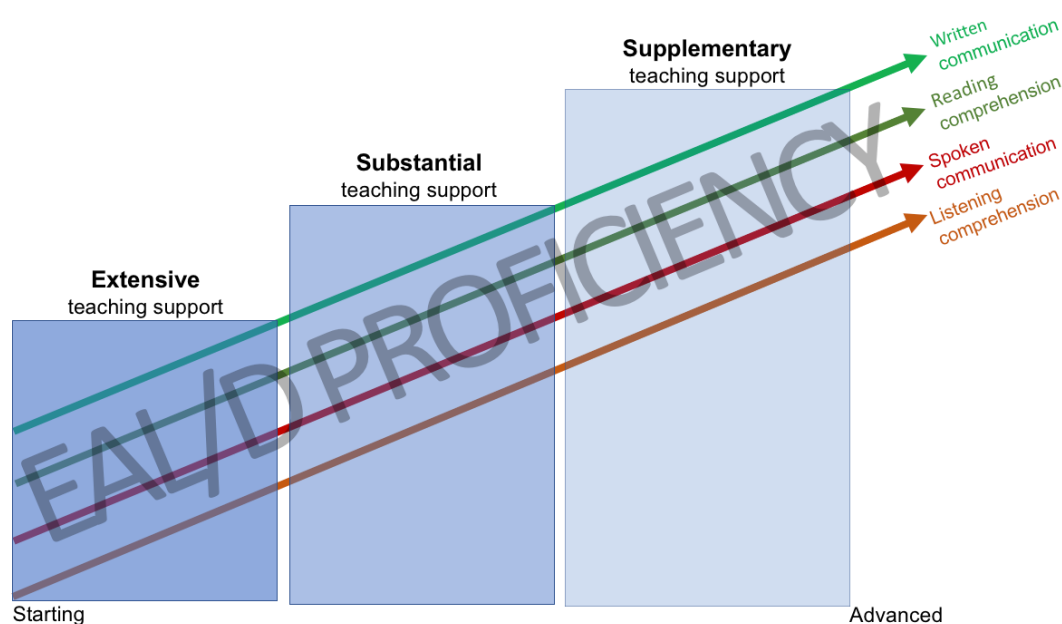
Experts in school-based ELP assessment with significant experience representative of the full EAL/D cohort would examine jurisdictional data, to report on the comprehensiveness of the collected EAL/D data set. A report on comprehensiveness would encompass whether all likely learner groups are identified equally well, the nature of the evidence base for the ELP proficiency levels assigned in each macroskill (i.e. speaking, listening, writing and reading) and the alignment of the different ELP tools. On the basis of this data, effect data could be established through correlations with other variables such as achievement data, English language learning support, curriculum provisions and location.

- 3) With EAL/D (effect) data positive educational actions can be readily undertaken to improve schooling for EAL/D learners. If increasing EAL/D learners' proficiency in the English language becomes a focus, then the knowledge base of EAL/D specialists with experience across EAL/D cohorts and contexts is valued, whereas currently EAL/D specialist colleagues inform us that this is not the case. Harnessing this expertise, the NSRA could drive EAL/D initiatives such as developing a suite of EAL/D language curricula across all ages (early years, primary, high school, senior years - including a matriculation subject) which would guide EAL/D teaching in the classroom.
- 4) Classroom teachers are expected to differentiate to meet their individual learners' academic and social and emotional needs. As well as these general expectations, teachers' professional standards require them to respond to specific learning needs and levels of teaching differentiation. Without EAL/D proficiency measures, this is hardly possible for EAL/D learners. Further, without EAL/D proficiency measures, there is no basis for a national evidence base for best practice responses for EAL/D learners at different stages.
- 5) Collecting EAL/D proficiency data systematically and over time, would build up an evidence base which would likely have further positive impact on the EAL/D learner cohort to
 - i. Provide guidance about optimal EAL/D learner progress over time that is sensitive to learner background and learning context;
 - ii. Recommend EAL/D support at various proficiency levels.

EAL/D data sets

All EAL/D proficiency tools describe English language learners' journeys, from beginner to advanced. These tools differentiate receptive (comprehension) and productive (communication) modes and the macroskills of oracy (speaking and listening) and literacy (writing and reading) for learners of the English language. EAL/D proficiency tools can divide up the EAL/D learning journey in different ways. However, no matter which way the journey has been sliced, quality EAL/D tools would align with classroom support needs such as those in Figure 2.

Figure 2: EAL/D Proficiency Levels guide level of teaching support



A national needs-based approach to EAL/D learners could also honour the often long term investment jurisdictions/sectors have made in developments in their local EAL/D proficiency assessment tools. Jurisdictions/sectors could, for example, be asked to justify how the outputs of their various EAL/D proficiency assessment tools fit with three very broad levels of language teaching support: *extensive*, *substantial* and *supplementary*. The submissions by each jurisdiction/sector could be moderated by a panel of school English second language proficiency assessment experts. If EAL/D learners become an equity cohort, with targeted funding, support and/or curriculum, jurisdictions will be incentivised to undertake this do-able piece of work.

Illustrations of potential EAL/D support levels are provided here for the consideration of this review.²

Illustrative broad EAL/D support levels

Extensive Teaching Support

EAL/D learners who require extensive teaching support are beginner and post-beginner language learners of English. Teachers are aware that these learners have full proficiency of their first language(s) and work to bridge between this and the classroom curriculum. To enable students' participation in English in mainstream classroom learning, teachers intentionally plan and teach the language that underlies all classroom curriculum, including for literacy learning. They provide context-enriched English language scaffolding (such as pictorial support, labels, charts, hands-on

² Support levels summarised from ALTAANZ members, Angelo & Hudson in press, currently guest editors of a special issue on Including the Excluded for *Studies in Language Assessment*, the ALTAANZ journal.

activities) and where possible also assistance through students' first languages. Students will be learning (at that stage mainly formulaic) everyday language and sentence patterns, including transactional and instructional words and phrases, not just subject specific vocabulary.

Substantial Teaching Support

EAL/D learners who require substantial teaching support are intermediate language learners who need language scaffolding across all subject areas to access the mainstream curriculum. Teachers will be pre-teaching the language of the topic, including the background knowledge, the key concepts to support maximal meaning making. They will be revisiting and recycling taught language to assist students to engage with classroom topics and enable students to begin formulating their own sentences for their texts which are going beyond the formulaic but draw heavily on modelled language. Teachers will be promoting deeper understanding of taught curriculum through a variety of meaning and language enhancing materials and where possible also opportunities for explanations/discussions in students' first languages.

Supplementary Teaching Support

EAL/D learners who require supplementary teaching support have levels of proficiency that enable them to access classroom curriculum where language teaching is provided. Students at this level can be missed as EAL/D learners, so teachers need to look beyond their 'general' spoken proficiency (which for example may contain few overt EAL/D features), by identifying their EAL/D proficiency as demonstrated in participating in mainstream curriculum tasks. Teachers clarify tasks through pre-teaching and post-teaching of language during reading and drafting processes, to address demonstrated language gaps, unfamiliar material, including cultural, subtleties, details etc. Students' additive bilingualism/multilingualism is encouraged by use of their first languages.

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