High-challenge Teaching for Senior English as an Additional Language Learners in Times of Change

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Abstract: This paper will present a brief overview of the recent shifts within English and EAL/D (English as an additional language/dialect) curriculum documents and their focus on critical literacy, using the Queensland context as a case in point. The English syllabus landscape in Queensland has continued to morph in recent years. From 2002 to 2009, teachers of senior English and English as an Additional Language (EAL/D) have witnessed no less than four separate syllabus documents that impact on their daily work. The Australian Curriculum, when finally implemented, will also require teachers to navigate through and grapple with its particular obligations and affordances. The combined effect of the shifts and tensions between recent policy documents has led to confusion about exactly how to cater for EAL/D learners in mainstream English. We discuss the possible effects of this on teachers as the agents of policy implementation and argue that in spite of such contradictions, EAL/D teachers can productively use syllabus frameworks to craft pedagogy to cater for their EAL/D learners’ language and literacy needs. Following this, we present aspects of the teaching practice of four teachers of senior EAL/D, who provide intellectually-engaging, critical literacy pedagogy that takes into account the language proficiency level of their learners, within the required curriculum. Such practice provides teachers with valuable pedagogic possibilities to meet EAL/D learners’ needs within continually varying policy terrain.

In this paper, we share practice that responds directly to the needs of senior EAL/D (English as an additional language/dialect) students, in light of the myriad of policy documents that recommend teachers cater for the needs of EAL/D learners in English classrooms. It is not a simple picture, but in a social and political climate where ‘high equity, high quality’ rhetoric is commonly discussed, (MCEETYA, 2008) mainstream teachers are frequently no more equipped to deal with EAL/D students’ specific needs than when they were initially trained. ‘Training’ or preparing to be an English teacher in previous generations did not include specialist EAL/D training. In university pre-service teaching courses today, tertiary educators are endeavouring to make new teachers more ‘EAL/D aware’ and there is currently a resurging interest in pre-service teachers training as EAL/D specialists (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008).

Against a backdrop of increasing responsibility for teachers to ‘implement’ the state and now the national curriculum, we scrutinise various Syllabus and policy documents for how they foreground one aspect of the teaching of senior English. Our specific focus is on critical literacy concepts, using the Queensland context as a case in point. Critical literacy is our chosen focus as it is an obvious dimension of high challenge English teaching, and because some teachers have found this feature of literacy programs problematic with EAL/D learners...
EAL/D learners, teachers, and the current Australian English curriculum documents.

EAL/D learners comprise a significant proportion of student populations in schools. For example, currently in Queensland, over 3000 migrant and refugee-background students are eligible for funded EAL/D support (Education Queensland ESL Database, 2010). This group also includes rural, remote and urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and LBOTE (Language Background Other than English) students. Many of these find their way into mainstream classrooms for a host of localised, institutional reasons. These include: insufficient numbers in one school to warrant the employment of an EAL/D teacher; or the student is deemed to have reached a satisfactory level of proficiency in English, despite still requiring considerable assistance with academic English. Nationally, there were also 24,278 international students enrolled in schools in 2010 with Queensland schools hosting approximately twenty percent of these students (AEI, 2011). These cohorts are spread across the whole range of educational sectors in state, catholic and independent schools. Many of these students are in mainstream classes with teachers who are not specifically EAL/D trained. In addition, many English teachers in Queensland find themselves fronting whole classes of EAL/D learners because there are not enough specialist EAL/D teachers to teach the new Senior English for EAL/D (2009) syllabus. With the ACARA model echoing this separate strand for EAL/D across Australia, the shortage of trained EAL/D teachers will also arise. Notably, the original 2007 version of the Queensland Senior English for EAL/D syllabus was redrafted with a reduced focus on language, without consultation with the expert teachers of EAL/D who wrote it, in order for mainstream English teachers to be able to implement it. This raises the question of who is the syllabus written for – the students and their language needs or the human resources available to enact it? The current milieu places the onus on education authorities to provide effective professional development in EAL/D awareness. Workshops for teachers providing theory and practical strategies about EAL/D learners in the mainstream have been sadly lacking over the past decade and need to be urgently reinvigorated.

Given that the F-10 mainstream English course (ACARA, 2010a) renders EAL/D largely invisible, the anomaly is that those EAL/D and LBOTE learners who make it through the junior curriculum are entitled to the option of a ‘special’ EAL/D course in senior under the current Queensland and ACARA frameworks. This raises some significant questions. First, who will be teaching the national senior EAL/D course? If Queensland, which currently has a separate senior EAL/D course, can be seen as an example, then these courses will often be taught by mainstream teachers who may be EAL/D-aware but are not trained as EAL/D specialist teachers. Second, how do teachers cater for those students who are not eligible for EAL/D funding, such as LBOTE students who have been here for longer than 5 yrs? Such students may not undertake the EAL/D course and may therefore be at a disadvantage in either the English (for mainstream learners) course or the English Essentials course. We know that although they might master interpersonal language quite quickly, it often takes EAL/D students up to 7 years to master cognitive and academic language (Cummins, 2003). Furthermore, LBOTE students may appear accent free, but still struggle with academic English. Significantly in Queensland LBOTE Students are now provided with support funding along with EAL/D students. The national position emphasises the range of EAL/D learners and their needs but how this translates into more localised contexts is our interest.

EAL/D learners’ needs were first mentioned in an earlier version of the Australian English curriculum document (ACARA, 2009a) in a generic way, however responding to feedback from associations and teachers, the latest iteration of the curriculum recognises EAL/D learners more specifically:
EAL/D learners are simultaneously learning a new language and the knowledge, understanding and skills of the English curriculum through that new language. They require additional time and support, along with informed teaching that explicitly addresses their language needs, and assessments that take into account their developing language proficiency. A national EAL/D document is being produced that will support the Australian Curriculum. It will provide a description of how language proficiency develops, and will allow English teachers to identify the language levels of the EAL/D learners in their classrooms and to address their specific learning requirements when teaching, ensuring equity of access to the English learning area (ACARA, 2010b).

While this EAL/D reference document is a welcome acknowledgement of the importance of language acquisition, the above statement positions the individual teacher as ultimately responsible for the provision of targeted and explicit support for EAL/D learners. This situation may escalate the work load and the multiple roles of the English teacher, who is now expected to be an EAL/D specialist as well. As Clarence and Brennan (2010) argue:

> the [ACARA English] documents reveal ... a particular imaginary of the ‘teacher’ who is to ‘implement’ rather than co-produce curriculum, where curriculum is reductively treated as largely a matter of content sequencing. In turn, this further reduces the work of teaching such that the ‘relations of ruling’ which are put in place fail to recognise the complexity of the curriculum work involved for the teacher. (Clarence & Brennan, 2010, p. 2)

This could easily lead to teachers bearing the blame for student failure, unless specific federal and state policy is created to ensure English teachers are provided with meaningful professional development in EAL/D pedagogy.

The most recent draft of the ACARA Senior English document (Nov, 2010) describes a separate course in senior for EAL/D learners. The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) responded to the ACARA, EAL/D framework and has noted many challenges arising from the proposed separate EAL/D course strand, including that not all EAL/D students will be eligible for entry into the course. Enrolments will be left up to schools. It is also unclear whether or not this EAL/D course will be substantial enough in terms of English for academic purposes to prepare students for entry into university or further educational institutions.

In other words, it may not be on parity with the mainstream English course in anything other than content; which seems less than adequate for the needs of EAL/D students (ACTA, 2010). That the EAL/D course is rigorous enough to be on parity is important in the light of goal two of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008): where, ‘all young Australians should have essential skills in literacy … and be able to think deeply and logically as a result of studying fundamental disciplines’ and ‘be on a successful pathway towards further education, training or employment’ (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 8, and 9). As the ACTA response to the ACARA document notes, the existing EAL/D courses on offer in the states and territories:

> aim to extend and refine language acquisition and academic skills of students with extremely disparate educational backgrounds and levels of knowledge of English through a wide variety of text types and genre. These ESL/D and EAL/D courses teach English through pedagogy that is not solely based on the study of literary texts. EAL/D learners have different needs to students studying English; they require different pedagogy, different (negotiable) texts, and different assessment tasks. (ACTA, 2010 p. 16)

The current iteration of the senior years English program in Queensland resembles the ACARA framework in that it offers four separate courses: *English; English as an Additional Language; Literature; and English Essentials*. At this point, it is unclear how the English course will differ from the EAL/D and the Essentials course. The current senior Queensland model also has four ‘strands’ or courses: *English* (2010), *English Extension (Literature)* (2010), *English for ESL Learners* (2007, amended 2009) and *Functional English Study Area Specification* (2006). In Qld, the first three of these courses allow university entry, whilst the last one offers a pathway to TAFE only.

**The Qld context as a case in point**

Amidst serious bargaining over various approaches to literacy in Australia at present, Comber (2001) reminds us that, ‘what counts as … literacy varies in relation to competing ideologies, discourses and cultural practices’ (Comber 2001, p. 277). Such a context is currently driven by corporate and disciplinary discourses that insist on reporting, assessment metrics and the standardisation of assessment (Comber & Nixon, 2009). Comber and Nixon (2009) argue that teachers’ talk about their pedagogic work takes a back
seat role in relation to the bureaucratic processes that now dominate teachers’ everyday lives. Their research in ten South Australian middle schools in low socio-economic areas found that teachers ‘downplay their professional knowledge, judgement and practice with respect to student learning’ (2009, p. 338) in order to meet managerialist discourse requirements. This has significant implications for teachers’ pedagogy. ‘Increasingly, it needs to be acknowledged that the room to move, whilst still considerable in Australian schools, is lessening, and that the disciplining of public education by government mandates is taking a toll’ (Comber & Nixon 2009, p. 344). The ever-shifting nature and requirements of English syllabus documents, as we report here in this paper, is evidence of these government mandates. One beginning Queensland EAL/D/English teacher reports the consequent confusion at the chalkface:

I went to a conference and they basically dropped the new syllabus [English for ESL Learners, 2009] on us, and there was such an outcry because … one syllabus was amended within a month of that new syllabus coming up. And it was crazy … trying to keep up with it all … all of a sudden there were three different sets of criteria sheets floating around, and figuring out which was which, and which one came from the amended version, and which came from the amended, amended version …

Two senior teachers of EAL/D also commented on the alarming lack of consultation and collaboration that occurred around the publication of this amended syllabus. A significant difference in the syllabus documents was the alteration of the wording to conceal critical concepts.

The ways in which the Queensland syllabus documents have framed critical literacy approaches in senior English have varied considerably since 2002. The 2002 Senior English syllabus (QSA, 2002) contained a strong critical dimension based on Freebody and Luke’s (1990) four Roles of Literate Practice model. The critical study of language was one of three framing categories (operational, cultural and critical) and key foci within the critical dimension included the ‘constructedness’ of texts, ideological assumptions in texts, representations/silences and reader positions. Revised in 2008, the next version saw the critical dimension diminished with greater focus on literary appreciation and functional skills development. Critical literacy was defined (in an appendix) as one of a range of sometimes contradictory approaches teachers might optionally use, including literary criticism and critical literacy. The 2010 revision of the mainstream Senior Syllabus remedied this to some extent, with the ‘making and evaluating meaning’ replacing ‘text constructedness’. EAL learners were taught from the mainstream syllabus with no curriculum differentiation, despite their unique needs until 2007. After much lobbying by teachers of EAL/D, the first senior English syllabus specifically for EAL/D learners was devised (QSA, 2007). This document framed the study of English according to three strands: Academic English, Literature and Media. While focusing on genre pedagogy and the teaching of functional skills, it did mandate ‘critical reading’ to be a focus of all units (QSA, 2007 p. 11). The notion of critical reading in this document drew on the understandings of critical literacy as explained above (QSA, 2002). The revised document, hastily prepared by the QSA to align with the 2008 mainstream syllabus, appeared in 2009 (QSA, 2009). The critical dimension of language study was recast in general terms like ‘analyse’ and ‘evaluate’ with no reference to earlier versions of critical literacy; yet work program requirements still stipulated ‘critical reading’ be included in each unit. In the draft senior secondary Australian Curriculum for English document (ACARA, 2011), critical literacy as a term is not used. There is, however, potential to critically evaluate texts within any of the four units: language, texts and context; representation; making connections; and perspectives, which run across the four ACARA courses.

As the overview above illustrates, English and EAL/D teachers have been experiencing rapid and significant change in the policies that guide their daily work. The question for English teachers then is: how do we now continue to ‘move’ pedagogically – designing responsive, inclusive and intellectually engaging curriculum (Comber & Nixon, 2009) for EAL/D learners?

High-challenge teachers for EAL/Ds – four teachers show us how

According to Cross’s survey of 52 ESL teachers in Victorian high schools (2011), higher order thinking should be a clear focus for ESL learners. High-challenge teaching, in order to avoid ‘dumbing down’ the curriculum for EAL/D learners requires high levels of support (Hammond, 2006; Hammond, 2008) but it is not always clear what type of pedagogy will ensure this happens. The following exemplary practice comes from data that were gathered as part of a large research
In this article, only four salient aspects of their practice will be presented here. In this section, we present EAL/D teacher practice through the lens of Janks’ (2010) orientations to Critical Literacy. In this model, Janks maintains that four orientations are possible – Domination, Access, Diversity and Design – that they are interdependent and ideally, that all need to be held in ‘productive tension to achieve what is a shared goal of all critical literacy work: equity and social justice’ (Janks, 2010, p. 27). Domination assumes a critical discourse analysis approach in which the language and images in dominant texts are deconstructed to discover concepts such as foregroundings, silences and whose interests are served. Access involves making explicit the features of the genres that carry social power, e.g., analytical essays and reports, hitherto assumed to be already in the learners’ heads. This has been a hallmark of EAL/D teaching in Australia since the 1980s and is an important part of teachers’ pedagogy. Janks (2010), Lee (1997) and others caution, however, that access without deconstruction can serve to naturalise and reify such genres without questioning how they came to be powerful. Diversity involves drawing on a range of modalities as resources and to include students’ own diverse language and literacies. Finally, Design asks teachers to harness the productive power (Janks, 2010) of diverse learners to create their own meanings through re-construction of texts. Students use a range of media and technologies to do so without relying on traditional print media.

In a unit on critical media literacy (Year 11), two of the teachers in this project used various YouTube clips from John Safran’s documentary Race Around the World (1997) to teach students the power of language and image choices in the construction of digital texts, and the range of positions from which they may ‘read’ such texts. One of the clips, ‘Story 10: Disneyland’, presents Safran’s account of Disneyland as a less than happy place to work. For these students, this was the first unit in which the students explicitly engaged with critical literacy in the senior EAL/D program. The assessment item for this unit was an analytical essay on an unseen question about a different YouTube clip, written under exam conditions. In class, the students explored three or four of the documentary clips (one per lesson) in order to discern how the creator of the documentary had used language, music, camera angles, colour, and images to create invited readings and to position viewers to accept their point of view. Marcus and Riva also spent extensive time (2–3 lessons) modelling the text-type structure required and the elements that comprise an A standard response to their critical investigation of the documentary.

In terms of Janks’ (2010) synthesis model of critical literacy, both Marcus and Riva successfully wove access, diversity and domination into their teaching. They...
helped students gain access to a powerful academic genre – the analytical essay – using diverse popular culture material through a process of deconstruction of dominant discourses and their textual features. By Marcus’s own admission, design was lacking due to limited time in the final term of the year. This was a source of frustration for him and something he hopes to address in the future.

2. Contextual elaboration
Despite the debate about what constitutes ‘background knowledge’ and who gets to choose it, elaboration of requisite field knowledge is fundamental in a required curriculum for EAL/D learners. In addition, it needs to go beyond what is required for mainstream learners. Scaffolding (Gibbons, 2002) is nothing new but it needs to be more explicit for EAL/D learners than most mainstream teachers think. Elaboration often invokes a tendency to give more information but often EAL/D learners need a more lucid explanation of the topic/concept, not more unfamiliar information which adds to the already burdensome cognitive load.

At the beginning of a unit on media representations of a social issue, one of the teachers, Margot, used digital images and TV media coverage to provide important background knowledge for her Yr 11 refugee-background learners. Rather than simply showing images which are loaded with cultural information that is unknown to EAL/D learners, Margot took time to explain, the cultural references behind the images used in the Ardmona Rich & Thick tomato advertising campaign in which Warwick Capper, Australia’s ‘playboy’ AFL player, poses wearing leopard print clothes with the words ‘Rich and Thick’ blazoned below. Margot’s recently-arrived refugee-background learners (mostly refugees from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Burundi with low to medium levels of literacy in their first language) did not know the background to such a personality to which an older, Australian target audience would have access, and therefore her students’ readings of these images would have been constrained without her detailed magnification of insider knowledge: the context and content of the images. In the process, she was demonstrating that all images, which are also texts, have been purposefully constructed by the image-maker for a reason and that they are also open to various interpretations. Ultimately, the students then had to research how TV and newspaper reporting represented and constructed a particular societal issue like attitudes to the aged or youth, and to present this in an investigative report.

Digital images alone, however, will not always engage some EAL/D learners, nor will it provide the necessary amplification. Teachers need a raft of activity types that draw on various intelligences and cater for the fact that many EAL/D learners are still acquiring the behaviours and practices we take for granted in senior schooling, for example, reading independently, getting gist from teacher talk and texts, and drawing conclusions. To address this, Margot used kinaesthetic activities with her 28 learners in a lesson on media representation of ‘truth’. Using a Russian newspaper report with the headline: ‘Russian car comes 2nd; American car comes in next to last’, Margot distributed slips of paper with the names of 5 countries and asked her students (in groups) to continually make the headline ‘true’, despite removing one country at a time. By casting the learners in an active role where they were physically doing the manipulating of language, Margot showed how writers can control language for certain purposes and how language choices can convey certain meanings. The activity took up 30 minutes of the 70 minute lesson. By the end, it was clear that most, if not all students took away a clear message that texts are constructed for particular purposes and audiences, and that language choices wield power. She was then able to move into the enhancing phase of the lesson in which she started to use the jargon of critical literacy:

Margot: So, two things. One thing that we talked about last week is how you use language. Language can give us very different meanings, and you saw how language gave you a very different meaning. Because when you first read (the headline) it makes it sound as if Russia is good and America is bad, and yet you saw that it wasn’t necessarily true … so what does this show? Okay, so I want you to write this down- and these are important understandings. These are things that we really need to understand for the next two years. (Reading from the power point) – ‘the way in which language and images are used influence the way we understand the message of the text’. So the way that something is written, and not just written, even the way a picture is shown, influences what we understand. So when we read that newspaper headline, we understood something because of the way language was used.

Our interpretation here is that Margot used a combination of three critical literacy orientations in this lesson. Domination is evident in her deconstruction of the language choices of the headline. Access is also evident in that she draws attention to the dominant news genre and parts of its structure. These two orien-
tations characterise much of Margot’s work. To a lesser extent, Diversity is apparent in her choice of resource – a Russian newspaper found on the internet – and her choice of hands-on activity to meet the interests of her diverse learners. Design does not feature heavily in this lesson or unit as the students are asked to write a standard report on their research about a social issue. While Design offers possibilities for new representations and increased student agency, the fact that this element is largely absent in Margot’s and the other teachers’ pedagogy indicates the ‘unavoidably partial selection’ (Green, 2002, p. 9) that is part of the interpretation of curriculum. The pressure felt by teachers to give EAL/D students access to dominant forms often overrides the opportunity to challenge these forms and design new ones. This is a significant challenge for EAL/D educators to address in the future.

3. Focus on writing from the outset

Senior curricula demand students provide written evidence of their critical engagement with text. As noted above, this often leaves teachers with no choice but to draw on an Access orientation coupled with Domination. This is important for EAL/D students who would otherwise not know how to master these ‘genres of power’ (Martin, Christie & Rothery, 1987). In order to meet this imperative, the four teachers all expected their students to write from the very first lesson and they maintained a strong focus on sentence level grammar and text-level structure.

All of the teachers acknowledged that the students often had the capability to think critically. It was the mechanism by which this thinking is assessed that is the stumbling block.

Marcus: I think that the biggest problem … is their communication. They understand the concepts … but a lot of them don’t write as well … they understand the critical terminology and how they are being positioned; whether or not they can write it fluently is the big ask for many …

In this excerpt, Marcus is aware that his learners have the intellectual ability to think critically but their writing skills need developing if they are to communicate their critical interrogation of texts. All four teachers scaffolded writing explicitly. Margot asked her students to write paragraphs regularly for diagnostic and modelling purposes. Riva used peer-editing on the white board as a regular feature of her practice with attention drawn to explicit sentence and clause level grammar in almost every lesson. This requires detailed language knowledge which not all English teachers feel confident to teach. Both Marcus and Riva asked their students to co-construct a practice assessment response text in groups of 3 or 4. Each student had one section to write and then the whole text was assembled and checked over for expression as well as critical content by the other members of the group. This jigsaw activity is widely used in EAL/D pedagogy but often overlooked in mainstream classrooms as it is seen as time consuming. However, it can effectively address the issue of mastering written expression as each learner only has one small section to write. They can also see what others have written – a useful modelling technique.

Marcus and Riva also explicitly taught and regularly recycled the critical literacy terminology to be used in writing.

Marcus: … we unpack … the terminology that they are going to be hit with … the first thing that we give them are cloze exercises that have those words missing but have the sentence starters and show them … a few topic sentences and see what they come up with after that. We scaffold them with regards to the requirements of an essay, their introductory sentence, their thesis, their preview – everything that has to do with the genre as well. Every time that we speak about this I would be using the terminology that I expect them to have in the essay. We do give them a model … so they can actually see how the different critical aspects have been spoken [written] about.

Marcus has no choice about the assessment instrument for this term, (an analytical essay in response to an unseen question under exam conditions about a media clip), so he addresses the students’ varied writing needs, explicitly and transparently, in his day-to-day pedagogy. He teaches overtly, and repeatedly uses, the required terminology in his own teacher talk. One whole lesson was designated to the students highlighting the key critical literacy terms (or ‘spice words’ as Marcus referred to them, such as marginalisation, foregrounding, and positioning) in order to demystify an ‘A’ standard model, analytical essay (see Fig. 1). The students’ attention was drawn not only to the words themselves (a typical EAL/D activity), but to the ways in which these words served to construct the argument, through a series of lexical chains, and how they contributed to the organisation of the overall text and therefore to the quality of the argument.

An Access orientation is clear in all of the teachers’
teaching, a decision driven largely by two forces. First, many of their students are aiming for tertiary study – university or technical and further education – which demands mastery of critical thinking and the genres of power. Second, there is a social justice agenda that asks the teachers to ‘make students more aware of the motives … behind particular texts so that they become better informed people, better consumers’ (Margot).

4. Active engagement through talk
EAL/D students bring with them a set of varying positive attributes, knowledge, experience and skills, upon which teachers can draw. Powell (1998), who cautions teachers not to fall prey to ‘producing’ deficit or incompetence in our classrooms, argues that ‘we must differentiate between inherent incompetence and produced incompetence – which is created when we expect children from ‘other worlds’ to be knowledgeable about ‘our world’ (p. 24). To this end, Cronje (2010) encourages teachers to see that ‘students need not only be trained to listen to the voices of others, but also to acquire the practice to convey their own experiences, stories and stances’ (p. 4). This creates the possibility for teachers to draw on Janks’ Diversity realisation of critical literacy whereby learners’ own ‘ways with words’ (Heath, 1983) are given prominence in the learning process.

Jigsaw tasks used by Marcus, Riva and Celia drew on students’ own knowledge, insights, and ‘readings’ of the texts under investigation. For example, Celia asked her yr 12 students to form groups and to respond to provocative questions and famous quotes about oppression, power and corruption, at the outset of a unit on Macbeth. There was no right or wrong answer. One student scribed the group’s thoughts on paper and then transferred this to the white board for whole class discussion. Marcus’s class formed groups of four (mixed-ability) and pooled their critical investigation of various semiotic elements of the YouTube clip: use of images, use of music and sound, and use of language. The lists generated revealed significant complexity in their interrogation of the clip and provided weaker students with valuable insights from their peers. Giving EAL/D students time to think and talk in small groups, before a more public whole class performance, can generate fertile ideas and also the confidence to speak, two areas that teachers often say are lacking in EAL/D learners’ contribution to classes.

The four aspects of practice described above are snapshots of much more complex pedagogy and decision-making on the part of these teachers. We present them here as possibilities for practice that other teachers might take up in assisting EAL/D learners to engage with high-challenge learning.

Conclusion
In this paper, we have argued that English teachers are currently faced with a wide and often confusing range of syllabus imperatives in an era of high accountability in education. At the same time they are expected to address the needs of EAL/D learners without having access to the professional development needed to do so. We have presented aspects of the practical pedagogy of four teachers who specialise in making senior English curriculum accessible, yet also intellectually – engaging, for EAL/D learners who are still developing knowledge of the English language. We argue that these teachers demonstrate the kind of high-challenge practice that can be of benefit to EAL/D learners, and that many teachers will need significant professional development if the national English curriculum is to be implemented as it is currently evolving.
Notes
1. The authors are aware of the distinction between ‘critical thinking’ and ‘critical literacy’ (Janks, 2010; Cervetti et al. 2001) and do not conflate the two. We argue that high challenge learning requires thinking at the higher order end of the spectrum (e.g., analysing, evaluating and designing) and that critical literacy can provide one avenue for doing so in the English classroom.
2. For example: Level 4 readers ‘can read simple prose, for pleasure, which does not assume significant cultural knowledge; use bilingual dictionary extensively and rely on predictable, straight forward structure … Level 6 readers are able to comprehend lengthy, unfamiliar text, although slowly; will use a dictionary for precise meaning; can discern differences in style and register but have difficulty drawing inferences or discerning authors’ point of view and intent’ (adapted from P. McKay et al., 2007).

References

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GLOSSARY

EAL: The term ‘English as an Additional Language’ replaces the term ESL and reflects a recognition of the fact that ESL learners are often learning English not as a second language but as an additional language (a third or even fourth). ESL is still used in many Australian states and territories, and in some of the publications cited, however the ACARA framework refers to EAL/D which is the term we prefer.

EAL/D: English as an Additional Language or Dialect. ACARA’s addition of the term ‘dialect’ recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and their language needs. This is the term ACARA uses and has been used throughout this paper.

LBOTE: Language Background Other than English. Students who have English language learning needs may have been born in Australia but have a home language that is not English. They may speak English well but still have significant academic language learning needs.