

## **Book reviews**

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### **AN EAL/D HANDBOOK: TEACHING AND LEARNING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM WHEN ENGLISH IS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE OR DIALECT**

*Helen Harper and Susan Feez*

*Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA)*

*Newtown, NSW, Australia.*

**Dr Sue Creagh**

*Queensland University of Technology,  
& University of Queensland*

To the highly complex situation of the classroom, teachers bring a research-informed approach to planning, teaching and post-teaching reflection. More challenging may be the capacity to *enunciate* the theory and associated research which sits behind teaching choices, as the daily activities which demand attention provide little respite to ‘join the dots’ between theory and practice. Harper and Feez’s most recent PETAA publication, *An EAL/D Handbook: Teaching and Learning across the curriculum when English is additional language or dialect* opens the space for just such enunciation.

Lingard and Renshaw (2009) argue that teaching is “a research-informed profession” (p. 26) and teachers can be supported to have a “researchly disposition” (p. 27) involving “two-way substantive conversations between researchers and practitioners.” (p. 34). I will argue in this review that Harper and Feez (2021) provide such an opportunity in this publication. I recently chose to use this text as the basis for professional development activities with specialist EAL/D teachers who sought to review and define their own unique pedagogical practices in their EAL/D classrooms. I chose this contemporary publication for the very reason that it modelled a dialogue between theory and action, between researchers and practitioners. Rather than explore in a more traditional way the content of the text, I will illustrate how I used this text, as another way of providing insight into its value. I will begin first with a brief overview of the book.

*An EAL/D Handbook: Teaching and learning across the curriculum when English is an additional language or dialect*, edited by Helen Harper and Susan Feez, and published by PETAA in 2021, provides genuine insight into the thinking of teachers, as they describe in detail some aspect of EAL/D teaching and learning in action. Whilst this kind of insight into EAL/D pedagogy is invaluable, what makes this text particularly rich for teachers is the accompanying partner dialogue/commentary from contemporary researchers and scholars working in the field of language education in Australia. Pedagogical insight relevant to the practice in each of the chapters is provided by academic scholars, enabling the reader to 'make theoretical sense' of the teaching and learning being described. Each report by a teacher is foregrounded by a summary of related theoretical knowledge, providing a reading lens to support the reader in making connections between the more abstract theories which inform EAL/D pedagogy and the activities and planning which translate that theory into practice.

To illustrate, Chapter 2 begins with Bev Derewianka, introducing us to the teaching and learning cycle, and the purpose of each stage of this cycle. Derewianka highlights the theoretical bedrock of this cycle, which was originally developed in the 1990s, based on Vygotskian principles of scaffolding, utilizing systemic functional linguistics and genre theory. We then meet teachers Barbara Dahlsen and Rebekah Jones who take us into a classroom for beginner EAL/D students in upper primary (years 3-6). They describe in detail the student group, their linguistic and cultural resources, their English language learning needs, and the context for the learning being presented in the chapter. For these learners, the teaching and learning cycle provides the framework for a focused study of houses (with links made to the Australian curriculum, in science and geography). Dahlsen and Jones provide us with a rich textual and visual description of the activities undertaken at each stage of the cycle, followed by a reflection on the successes and challenges they experienced. In this chapter, thanks to both parts -theoretical and practical- we can make sense of the theoretical principles which inform the choices the teachers are making as they plan and deliver the teaching and learning activities for this student group. The structure of this chapter, where theory is followed by practice is then replicated across the remaining chapters, with each chapter offering us insight into different kinds of EAL/D contexts.

In utilizing *An EAL/D Handbook* as a professional development (PD) resource, I designed discussion prompts for PD participants based on some of the chapters. I share some of these materials below as examples which could be reshaped, depending on the context, or could inform further activities with this text. The goal for the PD was to support teachers to explore and express their own pedagogical practices as EAL/D teachers. The PD activities were undertaken as part of a longstanding and close partnership, where I have worked on a number of projects with this group of teachers, and we share a strong collegiality. The chapters of *An EAL/D Handbook* were springboards for the teachers to review and reflect on their own classrooms, and to support this goal, I created reading guides and prompts for their consideration (below). Keeping in mind the workload of the teachers, I provided summaries of the key messages presented in Chapters 3 and 4, to support the PD participants' reading and our subsequent discussions.

## **Reading guides and prompts**

### *Chapter 2*

After reading Chapter 2 of Harper and Feez (2021), consider the following for discussion while keeping in mind your own teaching and learning habits, practices, and understandings in reviewing each of these questions:

- 1) To what extent is your planning guided by a version of the teaching and learning cycle (Figure 2.1 on page 43)?
- 2) How does this cycle align with the curriculum documents and resources you use?
- 3) Are there other frameworks/cycles/guides that you draw on for your planning?
- 4) The chapter provides some examples of how the teachers break down the learning and embed language learning in the unit of work. It provides a useful model for us to consider and review in light of our own classroom activities. Use this summary table as a checklist to indicate which aspects you feel are strong in your teaching repertoire, which you would like to work on, and add any techniques you utilise which have not been included.

Cycle stages	Their activities	I do this ✓	My goal ✓	Comments
Building knowledge of the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim for message abundancy through use of multiple modes and media</li> <li>• Review of language (vocab) relevant to topic that students already know (e.g., think-pair-share activity)</li> <li>• Picture wall, building vocab relevant to topic (e.g., classificatory language)</li> <li>• Excursion relevant to topic (e.g., neighbourhood walk) with retrieval chart or similar</li> <li>• Watch videos (e.g., YouTube)</li> <li>• Read texts related to unit of work topic</li> <li>• Discussing and labelling static images</li> <li>• Undertaking hands-on activities</li> <li>• Taking part in scaffolded talk (whole of class, in groups)</li> </ul>			

Cycle stages	Their activities	I do this ✓	My goal ✓	Comments
Supported reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read-aloud (whole class)</li> <li>• Modelled reading (whole class)</li> <li>• Shared reading (whole class)</li> <li>• Guided reading (groups/pairs/individuals)</li> <li>• Collaborative reading (groups/pairs/individuals)</li> <li>• Independent reading</li> <li>• Teacher-talk about reading text with students (see page 49)</li> <li>• Comprehension activities</li> </ul>			
Learning about the genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a model of target genre</li> <li>• Deconstruction and reconstruction of target genre (e.g., scrambled sentences)</li> <li>• Grammar patterns of relevant genre (sentence structures, types of verbs, building noun groups, circumstances, tense etc.)</li> </ul>			

Cycle stages	Their activities	I do this ✓	My goal ✓	Comments
Supported writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing an extended text by copying a model (or with some adaptations)</li> <li>• Writing extended text by adapting a model (working with teacher)</li> <li>• Working in pairs/groups to write extended text (e.g., dictagloss)</li> </ul>			
Independent use of the genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent writing of target text</li> <li>• Conferencing with teacher and/or peers about writing</li> <li>• Self-assessment activities against rubric</li> <li>• Presentation/performance of writing</li> <li>• Feedback to students about their writing</li> <li>• Assessment of independent writing</li> </ul>			

### *Chapter 3*

#### *What's covered in Chapter 3?*

Context of learning: Year 4 geography classroom, with input from the EAL/D teacher, Cindy Valdez-Adams, who works with the mainstream teacher to ensure inclusion of all EAL/D students.

#### *Key messages covered in the chapter*

Jenny Hammond describes the three key foci of the geography program:

- Teaching students to think and write about geography (giving students a purpose/reason for learning geography)
- Teaching students the required content (in the case presented in this chapter, this is about landforms and landmarks and why particular sites should be protected)
- Teaching students the language and literacy features of geography

Jenny suggests that the second and third foci are common while the first is less common, but is important, because often EAL/D students find it challenging to explain why they are engaging in particular activities - the purpose is not always communicated.

The purpose of learning is built into all planning and activities, and supports why students are doing what they are doing (learning to think and write like geographers).

Overview of a couple of lessons, giving details of the ways in which learning builds across the lessons - these are nice summaries of the key stages of a lesson in which language pedagogy is embedded.

Examples of scaffolding demonstrated in the lesson planning.

Two terms are used: designed-in and contingent scaffolding. Designed scaffolding refers to planned support, e.g., activities consciously designed and selected to scaffold learning, so pre-planned, while contingent scaffolding (also referred to by Gibbons as interactional) is not planned but may arise in the course of an activity and would look like spontaneous talk between teacher and student/s or between students. (Gibbons, 2009).

The following pedagogical practices are described in this chapter and include:

High challenge and high expectations:

- Explicit overlay of purpose to the teaching unit - the 'mama goal' (learning to think and write like geographers), and backward planning from this
- All students are expected to participate regardless of language learning level
- Deliberate task design moving from highly supported to independent engagement

Targeted and differentiated support through scaffolding:

- Use of texts in different modalities
- A minimum of five opportunities to engage with content in different ways, via interesting and motivating tasks
- Lessons have stable recurring structures which move students from a controlled activity to a guided activity and finally a more independent activity
- Goals for learning, each lesson, clearly enunciated and reviewed at the end of each lesson
- Peer support in L1 possible, opportunities also for peers to model their own learning

Talking to learn and learning to talk:

- Meaningful opportunities for talk, in whole of class, pairs (e.g., think-pair-share), and in group work
- Opportunities for informal talk with classmates and formal talk with whole of class, to build language of geography

*Our thinking and sharing*

Reflect on your current classroom and teaching and learning activities.

What is the purpose of learning in your classroom (the 'mama goal')?

Describe what the following looks like in the context of your own practice:

- High challenge and high expectation
- Targeted and differentiated scaffolding
- Talking to learn and learning to talk



## *Chapter 4*

### *What's covered in Chapter 4?*

Context of learning: Year 6 primary classroom, working with students who had commenced school as EAL/D students but are no longer eligible for funding, despite continuing to need EAL/D assistance. The teacher in this chapter is a literacy teacher, who works with classroom teachers to support the embedding of literacy into classroom teaching. The students are working on a unit of work on immigration to Australia.

### *Key messages covered in the chapter*

Framework for implementing a dialogic classroom provided. The six principles of a dialogic classroom (Table 1.4) are described as:

- Collective, reciprocal, supportive - establish conduct and ethos for a dialogic classroom
- Deliberative, cumulative, purposeful - support the building of content knowledge

Clear explanation of why dialogic talk is important for EAL/D students, and how it supports language development.

Illustration of practice documents the preparation of the students so that they can participate in a Socratic circle.

The teaching sequence both recognises what the students know and clearly outlines what the teaching and learning is targeting. This involves both content, but also lots of skills in talking, using language for interaction, expressing and developing ideas, and interacting with others.

Texts are utilised but annotating texts, rather than writing, is the focus. A range of texts provide students with the content they will take to the Socratic circle. Nice ideas are given as prompts for students to annotate texts (Figure 4.3).

Explicit teaching of the Socratic circle, with a range of roles for students and capacity to scaffold this whole activity, whilst ensuring all students have a role to play, including an observation sheet for recording interaction for those not in the circle.

Opportunity to exploit some of the spoken language to transpose into written mode and explore features of written academic language.

*Our thinking and sharing*

Has anyone used a Socratic circle in their classroom? How could it be used with your EAL/D students?

What are the pedagogical universals of this which might be adapted for your teaching context?

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What I have presented here is just one aspect of the PD activities we undertook, however, these reading and reflection activities which drew on this book, helped navigate us towards a central conversation about pedagogy and enabled us to consider, in a deep sense, what constitutes a language pedagogy and how this pedagogy is enacted through teaching strategies which support language learning.

Finally, while *An EAL/D Handbook* is valuable for EAL/D teachers, it offers professional knowledge for all teachers of EAL/D students. It certainly offers excellent content as a basis for professional reflection on teaching which is theoretically informed and inclusive of EAL/D students. Importantly, it has much to offer Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, where its content should be utilised to give pre-service teachers some insight into EAL/D pedagogy, both theoretically, and in action. It has the scope to support “researchly dispositions” (Lingard & Renshaw, 2009, p.27) in teachers and pre-service teachers, building capacity to enunciate that important relationship between theory and practice.

**References**

- Gibbons, P. (2009). *English learners, academic literacy and thinking: Learning in the challenge zone*. Heinemann.
- Lingard, B. & Renshaw, P. (2009), Teaching as a research-informed and research-informing profession. In Campbell, A. & Groundwater-Smith, S. (Eds) (2009) *Connecting Inquiry and Professional Learning in Education*. Routledge.