Unguided. Assessing young EAL/D learners' achievements in mainstream curriculum areas

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This case study serves to illustrate challenges faced by classroom educators when assessing the achievement of young English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learners in the Australian Curriculum. The study is situated in a remote community where a traditional Indigenous language is spoken as the everyday form of communication, and English is learned in what is essentially a foreign language (EFL) setting. Although the students' English proficiency is not advanced, they are learning the mainstream curriculum, delivered and assessed through English. The study triangulates the available assessment guidance with the skills of a classroom teaching team and sample written and oral evidence of their students' learning, with reference to a Year 2 achievement standard in Science. This methodology draws out the ways in which the Australian Curriculum assessment materials lack applicability to this and similar remote Indigenous community EFL classrooms because this work is unguided. A specific improvement would be annotated exemplars which illustrate how to assess EAL/D learner achievement in each learning area – Science, Mathematics and so on. Assessment is pivotal for informing teaching, feeding back to students, reporting to parents/caregivers, and for system accountabilities. Thus, the relationship between assessing student learning of Australian Curriculum subject areas, and assessing the language and learning requirements of students whose English proficiency is not advanced, needs to be clearly articulated.

Key words: Australian Curriculum, early years TESOL assessment, remote community Indigenous students, EAL/D in the classroom, CLIL.

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Introduction

Assessment is a routine yet pivotal aspect of classroom practice. Through informal and formal, formative and summative assessment tasks that they design, teachers determine how well individual students have learned the intended curriculum concepts and skills, and establish the range of student achievement in the whole class, for any given component and subject in the Australian Curriculum. This informs their planning for the next phases of teaching. Assessment task feedback informs students of their achievements and develops their learning of self-regulation skills and goal setting. Further, assessment is the basis of the A-E grading scale typically expected in Australian schools and it underpins reporting of student progress and achievement to parents/caregivers.

While teachers routinely work with this range of commonplace assessment principles and approaches, the performance of English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learners adds an extra dimension. Their varying degrees of English language proficiency intersect with each and every curriculum subject area. Measuring their achievement requires simultaneous attention to the evidence that the students have learned the curriculum content and to the language they use to express what they have learned.

As this article will illustrate, ordinary and well-known assessment approaches break down when the medium of teaching and learning is not factored into assessment advice and models provided to teachers. Educators need guidance on how to make judgements on curriculum learning achievement by EAL/D students in their classrooms. Of all EAL/D contexts in Australian schools, the type presented in this article is arguably of greatest concern. In remote Indigenous community schools, the entire cohort of students are L1 speakers of an Indigenous language, and so are learning English and the whole curriculum in what is essentially a foreign language (EFL) setting. However, teachers in these schools receive limited specialist EAL/D support.

Since 2010, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has been developing, reviewing and maintaining the curriculum content and

achievement standards for the school levels from Foundation (the first year of school) to Year 10 (F-10). These cover eight learning areas: English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities & Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies, Health & Physical Education, and Languages. Six of the eight Australian state/territory jurisdictions have adopted these without change, including the Northern Territory (NT), where this article is situated. The curriculum authorities in Victoria and New South Wales have, respectively, 'incorporated' or 'adopted and adapted' the syllabuses in the national curriculum.

Every lesson and every assessment task in every Australian Curriculum learning area is inherently also a language experience for English language learners of various proficiency levels. This is a situation with high stakes and significant impact, as the English language medium cuts across and infiltrates all subject areas. The Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field has long recognised the need for teaching English across the curriculum, often nowadays also known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (Dalton-Puffer, 2007, 2011), and has used specialist second language proficiency scales and progressions to monitor EAL/D learners' progress (Creagh, 2014a; Hudson & Angelo, 2020). Although valuable, such approaches and tools do not touch upon the focus of this article, i.e. how non-specialist mainstream classroom teachers should assess EAL/D students' achievements in each learning area of the standard Australian Curriculum.

ACARA has provided teachers with an EAL/D proficiency progression. Some jurisdictions had already developed their own progressions, whereas others have since aligned theirs to the national version, including the NT. Such scales are general in nature. They broadly describe characteristics of students as they gain proficiency in each macro-skill, thus offering a practical, holistic tool for monitoring EAL/D proficiency levels and progress (Creagh, 2014b; Hudson & Angelo, 2014, 2020). However, this study is not about these scales, as they are not designed to interpret student achievement in each Australian Curriculum learning area, and do not provide advice on the classroom assessment quandary in focus here.

As Llosa (2017) observes, any assessment of content will involve language, and any assessment of language needs to consider learners' ability to use that language in a

content-specific context. Despite being entangled in English language learners' experience, language proficiency and content knowledge constructs are treated as separate. Leung and Lewkowicz (2017) question the validity of language-insensitive, non-differentiated criteria for the assessment of L2 English students' curriculum achievements. Yet this very circumstance has arisen from two related but opposing developments in the assessment of linguistic minority students since the early 1990s. Namely, while education jurisdictions have invested efforts in English as an additional language proficiency scales, all students regardless of their language background must participate in assessment approaches developed for monolingual English speakers – whether large-scale, high-stakes test regimes, or routine assessment of curriculum achievement in the classroom (Leung & Lewkowicz, 2017).

In Australian schools, mainstream classroom teachers without TESOL qualifications and training are increasingly being asked to manage students' EAL/D learning needs; to differentiate the mainstream curriculum to make it accessible to EAL/D learners. Yet the two assessment systems – EAL/D proficiency scales and curriculum subject assessment – are treated entirely separately. So guiding teachers' assessment efforts is critical across the board, not only for the historically under-serviced Indigenous EAL/D cohort in focus in this study, but for all EAL/D students. This paper provides a case study to support the claim that classroom teachers are unguided by Australian Curriculum materials when assessing EAL/D learners in each subject area. It highlights how resources for delivery of the national standard curriculum learning areas need to better support non-TESOL specialist classroom teachers of EAL/D learners.

The context

The remote community in which this study takes place is located in Central Australia and has a population of approximately 550. A traditional language, Arrernte, is used amongst community members of all ages, except when communicating with English speakers. Thus the students are best considered learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). L1 English speakers are a small minority of the community population – approximately 7% – and typically are short-term residents (Australian

Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In this and similar remote traditional-language speaking communities, families' requests for maintenance of their children's home languages and development of their English proficiencies are well established (e.g. Guenther et al., 2016; Kral, 2017; Purdon & Palmer, 2017).

Many Indigenous students in remote settings speak a new Indigenous language (e.g. Kriol, Cape York Creole, Torres Strait Creole), which developed comparatively recently through processes of colonisation. As they are not traditional Indigenous languages, they are not part of the maintenance discourse. Where new Indigenous contact languages are recognised and accorded status as distinct languages acquired by students as L1, communities have supported L1 bilingual programs, with a view to ensuring students understand what is taught, e.g. Meehan (2017). This may involve initial literacy in the L1 and/or learning support from teaching staff who speak the language. New Indigenous contact languages are distinctly different from any historical source language like English, and have the highest number of speakers of all Indigenous languages in Australia (Angelo et al., 2019; Australian Government Office for the Arts, 2020).

Despite being EFL learners, traditional and new Indigenous language speaking students are expected to progress through the same curriculum pathway as L1 English speakers in Australian schools for all eight learning areas. Even the English learning area offers them no EAL/D pathway. From an EAL/D perspective, they are underserviced in other ways too. For example, in more populated urban areas, students from recently arrived migrant and refugee families are likely to receive intensive English language instruction from TESOL specialists for a period of time, a service not provided to Indigenous EFL learners at the beginning of their schooling. Another response found in some migrant and refugee contexts in urban areas is funded in-class support from TESOL specialists, although this is a service that has been decimated in recent times (Creagh, 2019; Creagh et al., 2019). Further, EAL/D students in urban locations are more likely to have L1 English speaking peers, and much higher levels of incidental interactions in English outside of school. EAL/D learners in urban schools are also less likely to experience the instability and

disruption associated with the high turnover of classroom teachers, characteristic of staffing in remote Indigenous community schools.

Teacher education policy and implementation are limited and/or inconsistent for supporting TESOL approaches and accommodating the languages children in remote communities bring to school (Angelo & Hudson, 2020; Freeman & Staley, 2018; Gawne et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Poetsch, 2020). Pre-service and in-service professional learning opportunities are scant, and certainly insufficient to span the gap between the mainstream curriculum and the teaching, learning and assessment situation. In remote Indigenous community schools, teachers with general qualifications must differentiate the curriculum for a whole-class EFL cohort. This situation requires extensive TESOL specialist skills but in reality it is an unsupported EAL/D teaching and learning environment.

In some remote schools, local teaching assistants who speak the same language/s as the students may be employed to work in classrooms. Their bilingualism is recognised as essential, however there are no EAL/D training programs or professional learning opportunities for this aspect of their role. Additional factors that impact on assistant teachers' confidence as classroom language brokers include their own level of educational attainment (e.g. only 8% of the population in the community featured in this article have completed high school to Year 12 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021)); and their own level of English language proficiency, which is neither measured nor developed through professional learning opportunities.

A further important consideration regarding local educator expertise and confidence in remote Indigenous community schools is whether or not there is a dual-language program legacy. A limited number of remote schools – including the one in this case study – have historical involvement in a movement centred on advocacy for, and participation in, courses for adult L1 literacy skills, as well as local teacher training and curriculum development, that helped to build dual-language team-teaching approaches in their community schools. In the NT this movement received strongest support from school systems and adult education providers in the 1980s-1990s, but it has been subject to inconsistent policy backing and has not been needs-based,

widespread or continuous (Black & Breen, 2001; Devlin et al., 2017; Reaburn et al., 2015; Shore & Bat, 2014; Thomas, 2023).[2]

Many members of the generation of educators who were leaders in, and beneficiaries of, that movement are now retired or near retirement, including the assistant teacher in the classroom featured in this article. In comparison, the curriculum skills of members of the current younger Indigenous workforce in remote community schools are relatively under-developed, due to the decline in training opportunities. This adds yet another layer of importance to the call for explicit language guidance for teaching and assessing Australian Curriculum subjects.

In the Year 2 classroom featured in this article, the non-Indigenous teacher collaborated closely with her Arrernte colleague, an experienced assistant teacher with a three-year diploma of teaching who speaks the students' L1, is an advanced speaker of English, and participated historically in the dual language linguistic rights movement outlined above. At other times during her 30-year career, when working with teachers who have come and gone from her community's school, this same assistant teacher has not been invited to co-teach, but only to manage student behaviour and, metaphorically, to tie shoe laces and sharpen pencils. At the time of recording, the classroom teacher – a non-Indigenous, non-TESOL specialist, L1 English speaker – had worked in the school for five years, an unusually long period of service in a remote school. In their planning and teaching, this team draws on the assistant teacher's curriculum and linguistic abilities, to cater for students' L1 and L2 competencies and needs, despite the lack of recognition in the Australian Curriculum for the need to manage teaching and learning in this type of context (Poetsch, 2020).

The school in this study has 150 students, all EFL learners, and is staffed with non-TESOL-trained teachers, who have access to one EAL/D advisor who visits the school once per term, and whose energies are also stretched across several other schools. I

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[2] By my rough calculation, approximately 23% of schools in the NT where students' learning needs require language-focused responses (on account of them speaking an Indigenous language as L1) were enabled to provide such an education, at some point, for some period. This calculation is based on the figure of 25 schools being the height of bilingual education provision in the period 1973-2008 (Disbray, 2014), and the fact that 108 schools are in remote and very remote locations, where students are most likely to speak a traditional or new Indigenous language.

came to know the teaching team during my bi-annual month-long visits to the community, spread over five years, for my PhD work with families on L1 maintenance. I have been able to spend many weeks in their classroom, join lesson planning sessions, and gain direct insights into their work.

Method and data

This case study triangulates observations of the skills of the teaching team with sample written and oral evidence of their students' learning and the available assessment guidance offered by the Australian Curriculum. It illuminates issues common to other similar cases (Stake, 2005). The on-the-ground account offered here is broadly characteristic of remote communities in parts of the NT, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia, where a new or a traditional Indigenous language is spoken as the everyday form of communication by community members of all ages, yet English is the medium of instruction and assessment for all learning areas in the standard curriculum.

This study asks: For routine assessment of student learning of content in Australian Curriculum subject areas, how does the guidance offered to teachers align with the experience and needs of teaching in a remote Indigenous community school context where all students are EFL learners? The study uses data from the Year 2 classroom, to investigate the applicability of current advice to teachers about assessing student learning in Australian Curriculum learning areas, from Foundation through to Year 10 (F–10).

Assessing Year 2 Science learning

In the data for this article, the assessment of student learning is driven by a teacher-designed unit of work, which integrated several aspects of the three strands of the Science curriculum – Science Understanding, Science as a Human Endeavour, and Science Inquiry Skills, as shown in Figure 1.

SiLA

Science Understanding:

- *A push or a pull affects how an object moves or changes shape (ACSSU033):*
  - *exploring ways that objects move on land, through water and in the air*
  - *exploring how different strengths of pushes and pulls affect the movement of objects*
  - *identifying toys from different cultures that use the forces of push or pull*
  - *considering the effects of objects being pulled towards the Earth.*

Science as a Human Endeavour:

- *Science involves observing, asking questions about, and describing changes in, objects and events* (ACSHE034*)*

Science Inquiry Skills:

- *Questioning and predicting. Pose and respond to questions, and make predictions about familiar objects and events* (ACSIS037*)*
- *Planning and conducting. Participate in guided investigations to explore and answer questions* (ACSIS038*)*
- *Communicating. Represent and communicate observations and ideas in a variety of ways (ACSIS042)*

Figure 1. Australian Curriculum: Science – content relevant to this study

For each of the eight learning areas, ACARA provides teachers with achievement standards. These are in paragraph form, sequentially ordered from the youngest through to the oldest learners, F–10. For the Year 2 Science achievement standard, see Figure 2.

By the end of Year 2, students describe changes to objects, materials and living things. They identify that certain materials and resources have different uses and describe examples of where Science is used in people's daily lives.

Students pose and respond to questions about their experiences and predict outcomes of investigations. They use informal measurements to make and compare observations. They record and represent observations and communicate ideas in a variety of ways.

Figure 2. Australian Curriculum: Science – the achievement standard for Year 2

In the 'push and pull' Science unit designed by the teaching team in this study, students participated in numerous activities with concrete materials, spread across several weeks. They explored and compared the movement and behaviour of multiple objects of different sizes, weights and shapes, e.g. toy cars, marbles, playdough, paper planes, tissues, balls, balloons, rocks, household items such as furniture, nails, buckets, cups. The students were encouraged to hypothesise and investigate how and why those items yield to or resist air, water, and the competing push and pull forces operating from various directions. Other key concepts in this unit included floating, sinking and gravity.

Performing similar experiments with various objects provided multiple opportunities to revisit and recycle the same English language vocabulary items and sentence patterns. The hands-on shared experiences enhanced the likelihood of student understanding of the L1 English-speaking teacher's explanations, and the Science-specific language embedded in communication about the topic. The assistant teacher was available to support student learning by interpreting and explaining in the students' L1 when needed. Note, however, that several terms cannot straightforwardly be translated into Arrernte, and better guidance is required for such language planning that is inevitably inherent in teaching in this context (Poetsch, 2018, 2020).

During the unit, students recorded their observations of each experiment in a set of age-appropriate scientific reports in their workbooks, as diagrams with labels and captions. These provided opportunities for students to cumulatively build a portfolio of their learning. At the end of the unit, students were asked to select any three of the many experiments conducted in class and present them in poster form. The poster also required them to apply their learning to real-world contexts by completing two sentence prompts after a discussion with their teacher ("I can use a pull force to …"; "I can use a push force to …"). These sentence prompts align with the expectation that students describe "examples of where Science is used in people's daily lives", in the achievement standard in Figure 2.

I participated with the class in several of the lessons, and recorded and transcribed the teacher's discussions with two students. The transcripts and analyses maintain the same system of de-identifying participants as in my PhD study, which included 24

children and 6 adults (Poetsch, 2022). C01 (child participant 1) and C06 (child participant 6) were willingly and actively involved in all classroom activities and interactions during the unit.

Student work samples – posters and discussions

To assess individual student learning of the curriculum strands and skills (Figure 1) against the achievement standard (Figure 2), the teacher used C01's and C06's posters as stimulus for discussion at the conclusion of the unit. While the posters offer short, formulaic, written sentences, the discussions reveal in more detail C01's and C06's abilities to express their learning (in 16- and 12-minute recordings respectively).

The students' posters

Broadly, from a Science learning assessment perspective, both students refer to key concepts and elements addressed in the unit in their posters, e.g. air, water, force, gravity (Figures 3 and 4). Also broadly, from an English language learning perspective, both students have produced one of the formulaic simple sentence patterns which has been used in class, consisting of an actor, a *push* or *pull* verb and an object. C01 adds a directional, *up* or *down*, in two of the three sentences (Figure 3). C01 has an accurate rendition of the present continuous, but C06 has an approximation, with the auxiliary followed by a bare verb stem (Figure 4).
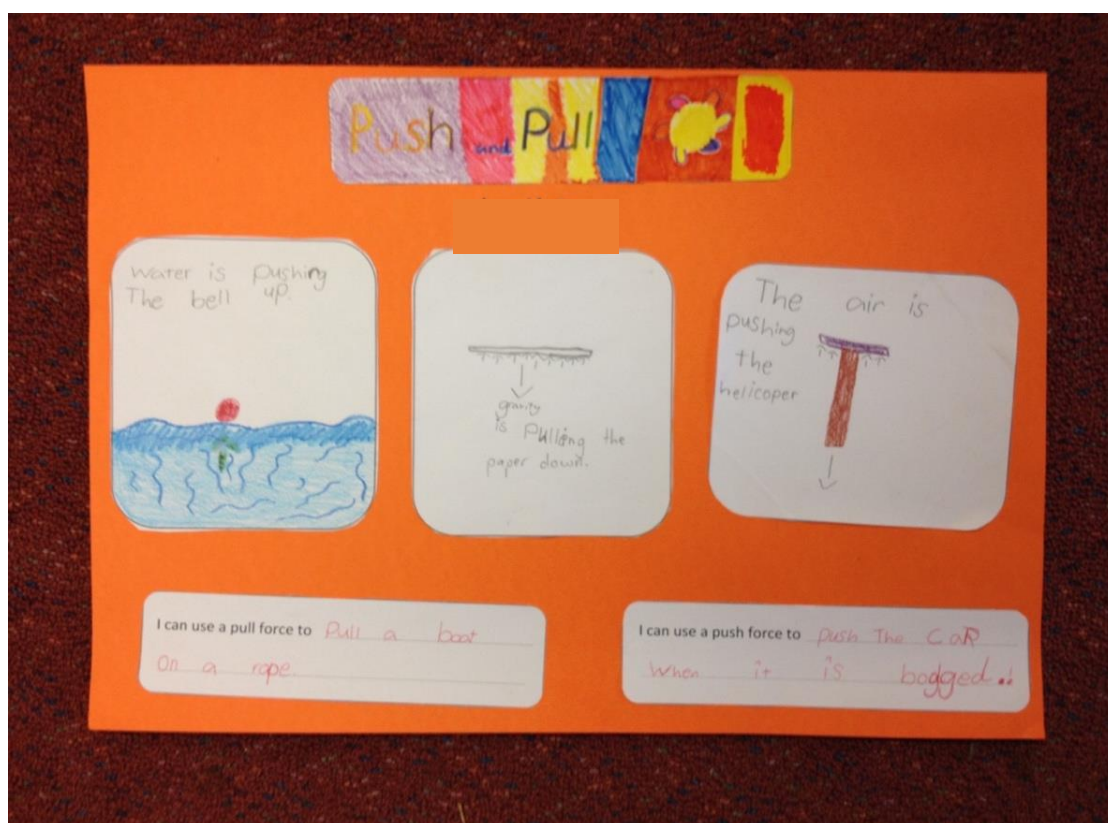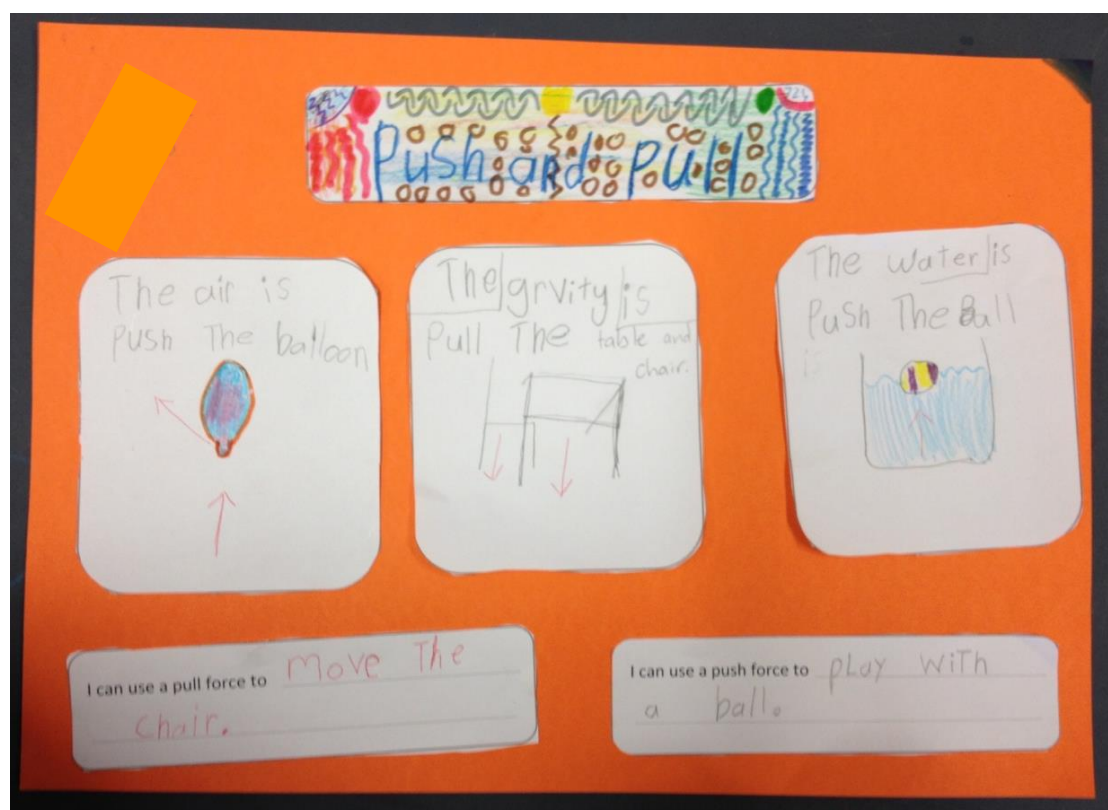
Figure 3. C01's poster

Figure 4. C06's poster

The students completed the top half of their posters (apart from the arrows) by selecting from the many 'push and pull' experiments conducted during the unit – each of which they had summarised and drafted earlier in their workbooks, in the same format of diagrams with labels and captions. These may have been produced independently, or with assistance from the teacher or assistant teacher, or using a mixture of these strategies. Thus, the teacher discussions are important for assessing individual students' level of independent achievement.

The teacher-student discussions

This section presents excerpts from the teacher's discussion with each student: Excerpts 1-2 with C01, and Excerpts 3-4 with C06. The teacher elicited details of their learning, through the discussions and by asking them to draw the arrows in Figures 3 and 4 above. She also negotiated with them the wording to complete the two sentence prompts at the bottom of the poster, and ensured the accuracy of the spelling and grammar, in this one-to-one support situation.

The analysis of the four excerpts below reveals:

- the students' expression of their curriculum understandings via their early levels of second language English proficiency with the assistance of their attentive, tuned in and active teacher. Their communication relies heavily on the fact that it is based in shared experiences, which facilitates their teacher's ability to understand them well.
- the teacher's various communication strategies and adaptations when interacting with beginner English learners, typically requiring her to provide high levels of support, i.e. recasting, extending and co-constructing the students' explanations with them.
- assessment conundrums that arise in the significant gap between the students' apparent understanding of key concepts and the ways in which they express that learning in English. The assessment process requires a considerable degree of teacher interpretation of the students' meaning and learning, against the achievement standard in Figure 2.

Excerpt 1

In Excerpt 1, the teacher used open-ended questions and opening statements, to elicit C01's knowledge (lines 1.1 and 1.3). A response required extensive and independent packaging of ideas into English-of-Science utterances related to the entire unit. C01 hesitated (line 1.1), and the teacher changed her strategy, to focus on just one of the images in Figure 3 (line 1.4) and, using a highly scaffolded interaction for the remainder of the excerpt, to elicit one piece of information at a time from C01 (lines 1.6-1.15). Teacher prompting and provision of key phrases and facts enabled C01 to explain her learning via English and demonstrate acquisition of key terms, e.g. gravity in line 1.13.

It is in line 1.19 that C01 produced a multi-clause utterance. She explained the experiment in which the ball she held down with her hands popped out of the water when she released that pressure, due to the air in the ball. It then floated on the surface of the water, with the water in the bucket being the source of the upward force; and gravity being the source of the downward force that brought the escaped ball back down to rest on the water surface, but no lower. C01's explanation is accurate but with many signs of a very early level of second language English proficiency: *Um we bin t-, ah, we bin get that ball big ball and we bin put it down but the-. Um and then when you bin let it go and then he bin go m- up.* There are many hesitations and false starts in C01's speech, e.g. lines 1.9, 1.11, 1.19. English learner approximations are also evident in the non-standard past tense forms and non-standard pronoun productions in line 1.19.

Turn	Speaker	Utterance
1.1	T	Tell, tell us what this poster is about. (5 secs). What's this poster teaching people about? (5 secs). About- [pointing to C01's poster title, in Figure 3]
1.2	C01	Pushing and pulling [reading her poster title]
1.3	T	About pushing and pulling-
1.4	T	OK, tell me about what's happening in this part of your poster. What's that a picture of? [Referring to C01s' drawing of a ball floating in water, in Figure 3]
1.5	C01	Pushing the ball
1.6	T	What's p- what's pushing the ball?
1.7	C01	Air

1.8	T	In this one? Is that air that's pushing the ball?
1.9	C01	[Shaking head and smiling]
1.10	T	[Smiling] No what is it?
1.11	C01	Um
1.12	T	Something is pushing the ball, you're right. Something is stopping that ball from going all the way down.
1.13	C01	Gravity
1.14	T	Gravity is trying to pull it down. What's pushing it up? What's holding it up?
1.15	C01	Water
1.16	T	Very good, the water, and so what does this say? [Pointing to relevant sentence on C01's poster]
1.17	C01	Water is pushing the ball up. [Reading the sentence on her poster, slowly]
1.18	T	Very good, water was pushing the ball up. Do you remember when we had a big bucket of water and what did we do?
1.19	C01	Um we bin t-, ah, we bin get that ball big ball and we bin put it down but the-. Um and then when you bin let it go and then he bin go m- up.
1.20	T	You could feel it couldn't you? You could feel it pushing up, yeah?
1.21	C01	[Nodding]

Excerpt 2

In Excerpt 2, C01 successfully applied understandings gained in the classroom experiments to the real world (a component of the achievement standard in Figure 2, which includes students' abilities to *describe examples of where Science is used in people's daily lives*). C01 described a car bogged in the mud at a creek crossing on an unsealed road in a remote location as night fell. She was a member of a group of people who tried several strategies to release the car from this situation, including putting sticks under the wheels and everyone pushing the back of the car; and also tying the bogged vehicle with a rope to another vehicle, to drag it out of the mud. From key words in C01's utterances in lines 2.4, 2.6, 2.12, 2.24 and 2.30 – *car, boggy, water, rope* and *with the car* respectively – the teacher was able to grasp the important components of meaning, work out what happened, and support C01 to elaborate and more clearly express the details of the experience in English.

Bin (lines 2.15, 2.17, 2.45) is a salient and repeated learner approximation feature for expressing past tense in C01's speech (but not C06's). See also Excerpt 1 above. C01's

use of *bin* also applies to the verbs which are a key part of expressing the target Science concepts. In lines 2.15 and 2.23, the teacher recasts these utterances, though she does not use the same recast nor any other "correction" strategy for the several other ungrammatical utterances in C01's speech, e.g. the prepositions in lines 2.15 and 2.23, or the lack of subject-verb agreement in line 2.2). In all likelihood, the teacher was intent on piecing together the events recounted by the student and aligning them with the "push sentence" to be completed (Figure 3). Importantly, in line 2.36, it is the teacher who selects the "push" aspect of C01's described event, extracts a core concept from the discussion (lines 2.4-2.31), and supplies a grammatically well-formed sentence for C01 to write at the bottom of her poster.

Turn	Speaker	Utterance
2.1	T	So you can what-, what can you do where you have push something to make it work or to make it happen?
2.2	C01	push, push um
2.3	T	You can use a push force to-
2.4	C01	car
2.5	T	to push a car. When would you push a car?
2.6	C01	When um I bin push it over that side, mm i-, it was boggy
2.7	T	Bogged, yeah?
2.8	C01	Yeah
2.9	T	what does bogged mean?
2.10	C01	uuuum
2.11	T	Wha- what had happened to the car?
2.12	C01	Um it-, um we bin come back with-, we bin come back in the Toyota and and we bin see lights open. But we bin crossing that water.
2.13	T	Oh hang on, was there water?
2.14	C01	Yeah we bin cross then across-
2.15	T	And then you crossed it.
2.16	C01	And then and then the nother car bin come. And then we bin thing, and then that car bin get boggied. And then when it was getting night.
2.17	T	What does get boggied mean?
2.18	C01	Uuum
2.19	T	Does it mean the car was broken, or does it mean-
2.20	C01	No just car um, all the sticks was towards-, towards. Then all the sticks was towards um. All the sticks was towards the car.

2.21	T	Towards the car.
2.22	C01	Yeah thing um in the tyres. And then we bin thing and we did and then kids bin push it.
2.23	T	The kids pushed it.
2.24	C01	And then it and then it didn't work. But but when we bin get rope and then it bin work.
2.25	T	With a rope.
2.26	C01	Yeah.
2.27	T	So did you have to pull it later on?
2.28	C01	Yeah
2.29	T	But first you pushed it
2.30	C01	With the car.
2.31	T	Oh you pulled it with the car.
2.32	T	OK so um I think that's a really good one. [Directing C01 back to sentence on poster]. "I can use a push force to-" push
2.33	C01	Push [Writing "push"].
2.34	T	To push the car?
2.35	C01	the the [Writing "the"].
2.36	T	We could write "I can use a pu- push force to push the car when it is bogged."
2.37	C01	Yeah.

<u>Excerpt 3</u>

In Excerpt 3, this time with C06, the teacher again used the heavily scaffolded discussion strategy, after first giving the student the opportunity to respond to more open-ended questions (line 3.1, 3.3) and after the communication stumble in lines 3.4-3.5. The discussion then flowed as the teacher worked with C06 to simply recall the items used during the teaching of the unit (lines 3.7-3.20) and then to focus on the substantive concepts, push and pull (line 3.21), which C06 herself identified in line 3.20.

From line 3.23 on, the teacher asked C06 to draw arrows, a strategy to uncover her learning of concepts in the experiments conducted in class. C06 demonstrated her understanding that the air below the balloon is pushing it up, by correctly positioning the arrows on her poster (lines 3.32, 3.34, 3.38). However, she expressed this understanding verbally in short direction phrases only: *up*, *to up*, and *going up* (lines 3.26, 3.30, 3.36). Their shared experiences of classroom experiments and the concrete

artefact of the poster allowed them to establish meaning, even though the student's utterances are brief and approximate only.

Turn	Speaker	Utterance
3.1	T	The air is pushing the balloon. [Reading the sentence next to C06's drawing of a balloon in the air, in Figure 4]. So how did you know this? What did we do something in the classroom that made you think about this?
3.2	C06	[Nodding].
3.3	T	What did we do?
3.4	C06	Making it what it will do.
3.5	T	Making what what will do?
3.6	C06	Ah, push it or pull it.
3.7	T	Yeah ok so did we play with balloons one day?
3.8	C06	Yeah [nodding].
3.9	T	Did we have balloons?
3.10	C06	Yep [nodding].
3.11	T	And what else did we have, on that day? That was the very first day wasn't it?
3.12	C06	[Nodding].
3.13	T	The first day I brought in lots of stuff, balloons.
3.14	C06	[Nodding] Cars.
3.15	T	Cars.
3.16	C06	Marbles.
3.17	T	Marbles.
3.18	C06	Playdough.
3.19	T	Playdough, and what did we do with all that stuff?
3.20	C06	Um rolled, push and pull, too.
3.21	T	Yeah, yep, so, is that how you thought of the balloon? [Again referring to C06's drawing of a balloon in the air]
3.22	C06	[Nodding].
3.23	T	Good. If you were going to draw some arrows on here, you know how we like to draw the arrows about push and pull. Where would you draw the arrows? Don't draw them. Show me with your finger where you would-
3.24	C06	Ah here. [Pointing to a location, but not indicating a direction].
3.25	T	Going which way?
3.26	C06	Down, no up! [Laughing].
3.27	T	Going up, do you want to dr-, I think it's important for us to draw the arrows, do you want to, or do you want to draw [offering pencil] um in red [offering red pen].

3.28	C06	[Nodding].
3.29	T	Yep cos none of these have any arrows to show us, so I wan- I know you've written (on your poster) "The air is pushing the balloon." Can you show me the arrows about **how** that air was pushing the balloon.
3.30	C06	Mmm, to up.
3.31	T	Yep, go. You draw, you draw it, arrow going like that [pointing and indicating an arrow should come from below, up towards the bottom of the balloon].
3.32	C06	[Instead drawing arrow on the side of the balloon].
3.33	T	And-
3.34	C06	[Drawing arrowhead].
3.35	T	[Nodding] All right, good. And what about coming up from down here. Pushing, pushing the balloon up that way. [Pointing and indicating that C06 should draw an arrow coming from below, up towards the bottom of the balloon].
3.36	C06	Mmm, going up, ha?
3.37	T	Yeah, so the air is pushing that balloon.
3.38	C06	[Drawing another arrow, coming from below, up towards the bottom of the balloon]. See Figure 4.

Excerpt 4

In Excerpt 4, the teacher again used the productive arrow-drawing strategy to concentrate on some of the key Science objectives (line 4.5). She also used gestures to make visible the unseeable and competing forces (line 4.17). Through these strategies, she successfully elicited C06's understanding that the water in the bucket exerts an upward force on the ball floating on the surface, while gravity exerts a downward force on it. C06's early stage of English acquisition is evident when distinguishing two words that were used many times throughout the unit, but are a source of confusion for her because they share the same initial two phonemes 'push' and 'pull' (line 4.2).[3] With teacher prompting, C06 could accurately and in context produce the term 'gravity' (line 4.18).

As an early-stage English learner, C06 used generic verbs (*go* in line 4.6 and *make* in line 4.20) plus a directional term (*up*) to render the deixis inherent in push and pull. That is, to explain that the water exerts an upward force on the ball, C06 used the

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[3] Although not in the excerpt 1 and 2 transcriptions above, there is evidence in C01's recording too that the words *push* and *pull* (and also *put*) required concentration and attention.

phrase *going up* (line 4.6) and to explain that the air exerts an upward force on the balloon, she used the phrase *making it up* (line 4.20). On both occasions, the teacher recast this as *pushing it up* (lines 4.5 and 4.23), a phrase which she had already modelled (line 4.5), along with its opposite *pulling it down* (line 4.13).

Turn	Speaker	Utterance
4.1	T	All right and what about this one?
4.2	C06	The water is,, ahh,, pu-,, pulling pushing the balloon up.
4.3	T	Balloon?
4.4	C06	Yeah. No, ball!
4.5	T	The water's pushing the ball up. So again, we haven't got the arrows here.
4.6	C06	Um, it's going up.
4.7	T	From where?
5.8	C06	From- [Pointing to where she intends to draw the arrow, though with some uncertainty?].
4.9	T	In here? In the water? [Pointing to where the arrow should go].
4.10	C06	Yeah water.
4.11	T	In the water? Like that? OK show me.
4.12	C06	[Drawing arrow, under the ball, indicating an upward push force]
4.13	T	Yeah, very good. And if the water is pushing the ball up, what is stopping the ball from floating around in the air? What's pulling it down onto the top of the water? Do you know?
4.14	C06	Uuummmm. [Shaking head]
4.15	T	Something's making it stay on the water. [Indicating a downward force with her hand].
4.16	C06	[Thinking, looking up].
4.17	T	And not go woo-oo around us. [Gesturing, with her hands, a ball floating up and around in the air].
4.18	C06	Gravity.
4.19	T	Yeah very good. It's pulling it down to the water. But it does-, it's not sinking because the water is-
4.20	C06	Is, ah, making it up
4.21	T	Yep making it um-,
4.22	C06	Up.
4.23	T	Is pushing it up.

Evidence of learning in the student work samples

Through discussions about their posters with their L1 English-speaking teacher at the conclusion of the unit, C01 and C06 provided some convincing evidence of learning. To support their discussion with their teacher, the students were able to draw on and refer to the hands-on experiments and the findings recorded in their labelled diagrams. They were also able to apply their learning to daily life examples. However, the teacher understanding of the students' utterances typically relied heavily on the fact that they were based on classroom experiences shared by the interlocutors; the students' contributions depended on the teacher working the conversational space for them; and a considerable amount of input, scaffolding and interpretation was required from the teacher for the English language aspect of these assessment-focused discussions.

Assessment guidance for teachers

This section moves to align the evidence of learning in the student work samples with the assessment guidance provided to teachers. The guidance has three components:

1. achievement standards, e.g. Figure 2 above
2. example assessment tasks with accompanying annotated student work portfolios for each Australian Curriculum learning area
3. an EAL/D learning progression document.

Firstly, as exemplified in Figure 2, achievement standards for each stage of learning (F–10) are formulated according to the content which drives teaching in each Australian Curriculum subject area. The predicament for teachers of EAL/D learners, such as those in this remote Indigenous community classroom, is that the achievement standard assumes (though does not explicitly state) that English is the language of assessment and that students speak it proficiently. The students here, however, are in the early stages of EAL/D proficiency development and are still learning basic conversational English vocabulary and sentence patterns, as well as the English of Science (and of all the disciplines in the Australian Curriculum). C01's and C06's work samples are evidence of Science learning and English-of-Science learning. However,

equally evident is that this Science and English language learning is still at early stages, even after a comprehensive unit of work on the topic of 'push and pull'. For example, recall that in all excerpts, the students formulated very little material by themselves, and what they did produce needed interpretation work on the part of the teacher. C01 and C06 showed they were still learning the core words *push* and *pull* (e.g. substituting *put* something up and *make* something go up) – a stage of English learning which is considerably distant from the extensive number of English-of-Science vocabulary items and language constructions assumed in the Year 2 achievement standard (Figure 2).

Compared with classrooms in which children are English speakers, the students in this classroom have required a significant amount of extra time to learn –through English– the Science concepts, as well as the English required to demonstrate their learning, again through English. This double teaching and learning load poses another teaching and assessment conundrum, i.e. they effectively have less time in the school year to cover all of the other content in the Australian Curriculum: Science. Given assessment is a tool for informing the next steps in teaching: Should the teaching team keep working on the 'push and pull' topic, to ensure students understand more of the Science concepts? Should they keep working to develop students' English proficiencies required to express more independently and accurately those Science concepts in speech and writing? Should they move onto another part of the Science curriculum, to try to cover more of the content before the end of the school year? The assessment guidance to teachers is silent on such questions.

Secondly, ACARA provides example assessment tasks with accompanying annotated non-EAL/D student work portfolios. Three portfolios (downloadable files) each illustrate nine example tasks, which are genuine student work samples, completed to satisfactory, below satisfactory and above satisfactory achievement of the standard. (Typically a five point A-E grading system is in fact used in schools, rather than a three-point system). One of the example tasks, entitled 'Investigation: Pushing cars', aligns with the Science unit taught in the classroom in this article. It is a single example experiment, in which students apply no push, a weak push and a strong push to a toy car. They hypothesise the outcome prior to conducting their experiment, and later

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record their findings in drawing and writing. The teaching team in the case study in this article significantly extended this example assessment task. Each of the three portfolios is annotated with teacher reflection points (in the form of qualitative notes), which explain and justify the professional judgement underpinning the level awarded: satisfactory, above satisfactory, or below satisfactory.

The predicament for teachers of English language learners, such as the students in this case study, is that none of the portfolios exemplify the work of EAL/D students. At least, this is nowhere apparent from the language features in the examples, nor is it explicitly stated. Certainly, no specific advice is given on assessing any EAL/D students in any context, at any level of proficiency, in any curriculum subject. Also, no spoken samples are provided in the portfolios. No portfolio exemplars explain (a) whether, how or to what extent teachers should modify the model assessment tasks for EAL/D learners, nor (b) whether or how teachers should assess how well EAL/D students express their learning of subject-specific concepts in English.

For the purposes of assessing student learning, should EAL/D learners simply obtain a low grade until they can produce a work sample like an L1 English speaking student? Should teachers favourably assess student knowledge of subject-specific content, even if they don't express that learning independently and accurately using expected English vocabulary and discourse patterns for their age-group in the field of Science? Should teachers place more weight on curriculum content understandings or English when assessing EAL/D students? Could students receive a high grade if they expressed their learning of curriculum content not in English but in their L1, to the assistant teacher? If students' English-of-Science is not accurate but their work samples (verbal discussions and/or posters) suggest that they have acquired key concepts, should they be awarded a satisfactory, above satisfactory or below satisfactory grade? An A, B, C, D or E grade? The assessment guidance to teachers is silent on such questions.

Now to the third component of assessment guidance. As part of their broader assessment toolkit, teachers have access to an EAL/D learning progression document – the national one produced by ACARA or, in the case of the school in this case study, the NT version which is aligned to the national one. It describes listening, speaking, reading & viewing, and writing skills, on a four-point scale of beginner, emerging,

developing, and consolidating. On the one hand, it is valuable as a general tool that informs non-specialist teachers about what EAL/D learner development looks like in the classroom, and gives them a sense of how to support the learners. However, from a curriculum assessment point of view, the progression document does not connect EAL/D proficiency with curriculum content learning (e.g. Figure 1) and achievement standards (e.g. Figure 2) in any of the eight Australian Curriculum learning areas. The language examples for each EAL/D progression level do not illustrate students' work in specific curriculum content areas, nor how student achievement would be assessed against a curriculum standard. The language samples in the EAL/D progression are in general English and do not exemplify subject-specific vocabulary, sentence and discourse patterns that can indicate concept development in each subject area.

How should teachers judge the responses of EAL/D students to mainstream curriculum tasks? For the Science assessment in this article, for example, should young learners at a beginner EAL/D proficiency level produce as many, and as complicated a set of, Science-related sentences and vocabulary as an L1 English speaker of the same age? Can teachers co-construct meaningful responses with students, and if so, how much material should students be expected to produce independently? Do rote-learned or highly familiarised English sentences (such as those at in the top half of the students' posters in Figures 3 and 4) count as demonstrating Science learning if they indicate understanding of the concept?

The EAL/D learning progression is not designed to answer such questions, although it indicates that responses to mainstream assessment tasks in the early stages of EAL/D learning will be of the type seen in Excerpts 1-4 above. The curriculum resources have not taken on these questions either, but it is crucial that curriculum authorities consider developing guidance for classroom teachers who, unguided, must confront the questions on a daily basis when assessing their EAL/D students.

Consequences of unanswered questions

The standardised curriculum assessment guides and tools – uniformly without regard for English language learner status – leave classroom teachers of EAL/D students significantly under-served. The role of the extensive English vocabulary, sentence

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structures and discourse patterns specific to engaging with and achieving in each curriculum area is not reflected in the system-produced advice and models available to teachers. Yet subject-specific English language is an inevitable and extensive component of the assessment of EAL/D students' learning in all areas of the Australian Curriculum: English (literature etc), Mathematics, Science, Humanities & Social Sciences, The Arts, Technologies, Health & Physical Education. In fact, early-stage EAL/D learners do not yet control everyday English either. This makes teacher co-construction of their ideas essential for supporting their attempts to express their meaning and learning.

There are no clear directions for teachers on how to weigh up English expression and demonstrated curriculum content understandings – whether to prioritise one over the other. Nor are there any clear directions on if – and then how – to take account of English language scaffolding, such as that provided by the teacher in Excerpts 1-4 above. Further, the EAL/D second language proficiency scales are not connected to the achievement standards for each learning area in the Australian Curriculum. This leaves teacher professional judgement on assigning grades unguided.

Students' English language learning and curriculum content learning coalesce in their listening and reading comprehension and their spoken and written output (and drawings). However, teachers of EAL/D learners – of whole-school EFL cohorts, in the case of remote Indigenous community schools – are left to resolve assessment predicaments everywhere that English proficiency and curriculum learning intersect. Should students be assessed on their curriculum content learning? On their ability to talk about that learning in English? Should they be given two grades – one for their curriculum content learning and one for their ability to express that learning in English – for each formal assessment task and each school report to their parents?

In the absence of clear, system-produced direction, the questions go unanswered. This forces individual teachers to decide on the basis of a best guess, on balance, but also in an ad hoc way. Crucially, this also severely downplays the importance of the English language for curriculum learning and achievement in English-medium classrooms. The absence of any guidance strongly but erroneously implies EAL/D status is of no import. Any support that students receive comes down to individual teachers (or

teaching teams in some locations and classrooms). The requisite support and guidance for the educators of EAL/D learners is not acknowledged and systematised. In remote community school contexts, this is a predictable and recurring assessment issue where whole student cohorts are at early levels of EAL/D proficiency but learning mainstream curriculum. They are in EFL learning contexts where their L1 – whether a traditional or a new Indigenous language – is the community language of everyday interaction.

Conclusion

Teachers need to make professional judgements about their students' achievement and progress each day, week, term and year. This article has identified language-related issues and questions about day-to-day curriculum assessment that are faced by teachers or teaching teams with EAL/D learners, but are unanswered by the Australian Curriculum. This is a profound and critical gap in advice, unfair for these students and their teachers, obscuring the role of English in an English-medium curriculum. It impacts on remote community schools where young Indigenous students at beginner levels of EAL/D might receive little or no EAL/D support, even though their L1 is an Indigenous language, and English is only used when interacting with English speakers.

This article has provided an on-the-ground account of the work of a teaching team, and the significant gap between the expected English-medium curriculum, age-related achievement standard in Science and the English language proficiency levels as reflected in the assessment tasks of two of the students in their class. The findings point to a lack of guidance on if, or how, teachers should untangle student curriculum learning from student abilities to express that learning in their EAL/D approximations of English. Classroom teachers without specialist TESOL qualifications must assess EAL/D students in their classes, without the benefit of national or jurisdiction guidance. There are no annotated portfolios that provide models of EAL/D student work samples measured against the curriculum achievement standards, nor is there explicit accompanying advice on how any grading scale (whether a satisfactory-above-below, an A-E, or a numerical grade) should operate in this context. But there should

be. EAL/D learner samples should be available for each of the eight curriculum areas for each age/stage of learning too. Teachers of remote Indigenous community school EFL learners are especially under-supported, as all of their curriculum assessment, for all subjects/learning areas, for their entire student cohort is predictably impacted by this system silence. Assessment (and curriculum) practices need greater attention and fairer guidance for classroom teachers of all EAL/D learners, but particularly for Indigenous students.

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