



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Section A: Teaching and Learning

A Professional Development Course in Australian Indigenous ESL Teaching

Kim Tan

Darwin, Northern Territory



Background

The impetus for developing this course came from a consultancy agreement with the Northern Territory Department of Education in 1998 to develop a program to address the special needs of teachers in Aboriginal community schools.

The course aims to develop language professionals with skills and understanding in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) to Australian Indigenous learners, i.e. to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. This will assist the NT Department of Education in the provision of:

- a systematic program of professional teacher development for teachers in rural schools, especially teachers new to this situation
- a unified ESL program across rural schools in Schools South

- job satisfaction and a formal certification of teaching competency in Indigenous ESL teaching and ultimately contributing towards the retention of teachers (Graduate Certificate in Australian Indigenous ESL Teaching website, 1998)

Graduates of the Graduate Certificate in Australian Indigenous ESL Teaching (GCAIESLT) will have:

- a general understanding of linguistic approaches to language, language use and language teaching
- familiarity with a range of approaches and strategies in the teaching of English as a second language (TESL) and the main principles on which they are based
- an understanding of the challenges of living and teaching in a remote Indigenous education context, school culture and the needs of Indigenous ESL learners.

The GCAIESLT course is based on the premise that learning must be relevant to the course students' current work situations. Accordingly, admission to the course will require students to have had relevant work experience, ideally

teaching as they study part-time. To that end, many assignments will ask them to apply their learnings to their past or current teaching context. The final unit *EAL408 TESL in Practice for Indigenous Learners*, for example, adopts the action learning framework.

In the rest of the article, I will focus on the course design, the component units and implementation of the program.

Course Description

1. Target Group

It is expected that most of the students of the GCAIESLT course will be:

- teachers currently teaching in community schools
- mainstream teachers in urban schools with some Indigenous ESL learners
- neophyte non-Indigenous teachers with little or no ESL teaching experience
- experienced teachers desiring to upgrade their qualifications.

2. Course Delivery and Learning Approaches

The program will be taught externally through printed course materials and the use of internet facilities for class interaction wherever possible. As the majority of students are practising teachers, some assignments can be based on authentic classroom situations and language data. Of course, it is likely that such assignments will have options, as there may be other students that are not practising teachers.

The external materials comprise a Study Guide (with specific learning objectives for each topic), a Book of Readings and Unit Information.

The students will be able to communicate with the lecturer and coordinator via phone or e-mail. Teleconferencing sessions will be organised at the end of each unit.

Learning will also be promoted by providing a workshop every year during the break in October. On-site tutoring or in-service programs will be left to arrangements between the teachers and the Department of Education.

3. Course Structure

The minimum admission requirements for the GCAIESLT are as follows:

- a Diploma of Teaching or its equivalent, and
- current employment or one year of prior experience as a full-time teacher of classes with a significant enrolment of Indigenous students.

The course will be available for study over two years (or eight school terms) part-time. With the focus on teaching in an ESL rural school situation, the course consists of four 10 credit-point units, namely:

- **EAL 400**
School Culture and the Needs of Indigenous Learners
- **EAL 410**
The Students' First Language in Aboriginal Education
- **EAL 403**
TESL Principles and Indigenous Learners
- **EAL 408**
TESL in Practice for Indigenous Learners

Whilst a pass in all four units will enable students to graduate with the GCAIESLT award, individual units are also offered as electives with the exception of EAL 408 which has the successful completion of EAL 403 as a prerequisite.

4. The Unit Writers

The team of writers comprised TESL specialists, practitioners with at least five years' experience teaching in remote communities, specialists in curriculum design

and applied linguists with work experience amongst Indigenous learners.

All members of the team were required to attend seminars organised by Barbara White, Manager of the Interactively Learning Division at the Northern Territory University. The training sessions were concerned with strategies needed to write interactively in distance learning. A detailed list of names is supplied in Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

I will now discuss each unit of the course.

5. The Units: EAL 400 School Culture and the Needs of Indigenous Learners

The first unit, written specifically with non-Indigenous teachers in mind, explains the challenges of living and working in a remote Indigenous teaching context.

It aims 'to introduce some of the materials and teaching approaches which take into account the cultural and linguistic knowledge, needs and experiences of Indigenous Australian students' (Study Guide, 1999 : 1). Detailed objectives are delineated in Table 1.

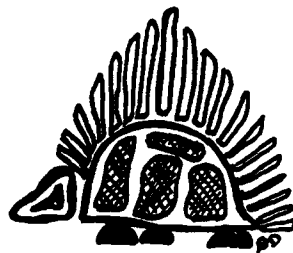
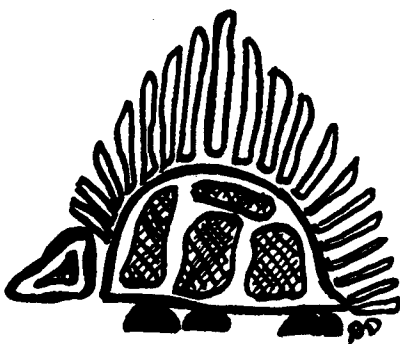


Table 1.1: EAL 400 and EAL 410. Unit Objectives and Writers

Unit/Unit Writers	Objectives
<p>EAL 400 School Culture and the needs of Indigenous Learners <i>Leanne Cook</i> <i>Ruth Gledhill</i> <i>Dale Morgan</i></p>	<p>Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) understand major TESL issues in Indigenous teaching contexts (2) identify specific needs of Indigenous Australian students in equity of access to mainstream education (3) improve educational outcomes for these students (4) define the culture of school in relation to needs of teachers and students (5) communicate NT Dept of Education's educational philosophy and culture and provide understanding of the curriculum, resources and outcomes
<p>EAL 410 The Students' First Language in Aboriginal Education <i>Dr Paul Black</i> <i>Dr Brian Devlin</i></p>	<p>Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) describe the distribution, use, social and cultural significance of language varieties in an Aboriginal community (2) state social, cognitive and practical advantages and disadvantages of various ways of employing Aboriginal languages in schools, including several approaches to bilingual education (3) point out specific ways in which the patterns of discourse, meaning, grammar and sounds of a student's first language may be reflected in the student's use of English

Table 1.2: EAL 403 and EAL 408. Unit Objectives and Writers

Unit/Unit Writers	Objectives
<p>EAL 403 TESL Principles and Indigenous Learners <i>Dr Kim Tan</i> <i>Cecil Nielson</i></p>	<p>Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) understand the range of major approaches and methods in TESOL and to critically analyse their theoretical principles and practical applications (2) examine the methodologies and approaches which have been developed over the years, especially the theories about language, language learning and intended outcomes, and consider whether they are meeting the needs of Australian Indigenous ESL learners (3) understand how theoretical principles can underpin the design of materials, curricula and teaching techniques.
<p>EAL 408 TESL in Practice for Indigenous Learners <i>Fran Murray</i> <i>Trish Joy</i></p>	<p>Upon completion of this unit, the students will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) assess the English language needs of Australian Indigenous learners in remote educational contexts (2) select, adapt and create tasks appropriate to the levels, interest and goals of these learners (3) equip learners with effective learning strategies (4) create optimally effective classroom environments (5) understand the diverse roles and responsibilities of the teacher.

The importance of sensitivity to the needs of Indigenous students was underscored by the recommendation of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (1992) in its report, *Language and Culture*. It recommended also that teachers in remote community schools where the vernacular is not English should have prior training in TESL before commencing teaching in schools in traditional communities.

EAL 400 has five topics, each containing reflective activities to enable the reader to apply principles introduced to his/her own situation, new input through information or strategies supplied and activities to link the new information to teaching practice.

Topic One, which identifies the ESL learners' needs and strengths, is followed by a comparison between the English the students use and the English of school. Topic Three presents an overview of NTDE's official

requirements in programming, teaching, assessment and reporting in the teaching of Australian Indigenous students in rural schools. Topics Four and Five examine the cross-cultural issues in teaching in remote areas, ways to deal with misunderstandings that may arise and the role of the school within the educational context of the community.

EAL 410 The Students' First Language in Aboriginal Education

This unit is written for teachers in Aboriginal communities where the children's first language can be in a traditional language, a creole or an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander variety of English. It is believed that with an awareness of the social and cultural significance of the students' first language(s), the teacher will understand some of the difficulties faced by Indigenous learners in learning English.

In line with the objectives (see Table 1.1), the six topics in the unit are:

- **Topic One:**
The students' languages : Roles and social significance
- **Topic Two:**
The first language and the school
- **Topic Three:**
First and second language learning
- **Topic Four:**
Culture and discourse
- **Topic Five:**
Word choice and grammar
- **Topic Six:**
Sounds and writing

Topics One and Two focus on the social aspects of language use, the nature of multilingual communities and the diverse roles played by the different speech varieties. Topic Three deals with language learning and how the first language can affect second language learning.

The last three topics examine the practical consequences of the influence of the first language(s) for Indigenous learners. This will be demonstrated in discourse, word choice, grammar, sounds and writing.

The role of the first language(s) is significant in that they form part of the cognitive foundations for second language learning. The unit writers emphasise that teaching English is like 'helping the learner master an additional language – "additive bilingualism" – not as an attempt to replace the first language by English' (Study Guide, 2000 : 138).

EAL 403 TESL Principles and Indigenous Learners

The last two units in the GCAIESLT course are TESL methodology units and are closely linked. This unit is concerned with the theoretical foundations of the teaching of

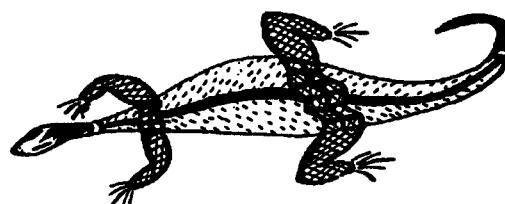
English as a second language and is organised into the following three topics:

- **Topic One:**
The ESL learner
- **Topic Two:**
Principles/Methods in second language acquisition
- **Topic Three:**
From theory to practice

Table 1.2 outlines the objectives of this unit. Topic One begins by explaining how method is related to theory, what ESL means, who ESL learners are, and the differences between ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Topic Two provides clear definitions of common terms in second language acquisition (SLA) to start with and then explains how different views of language have resulted in different approaches to language teaching. The theoretical principles and practical applications in the range of methods in TESOL are critically examined. Students in the course will be encouraged to examine their own beliefs about ESL teaching and language learning and about how they would apply theoretical principles in the classroom. For all nine methods, the focus is on theoretical principles, the roles of the teacher and students, interaction in the classroom, characteristics of the teaching/learning process and the syllabus.

Topic Three deals with theory as applied to nationwide projects and discusses the relevance of TESL principles in the teaching of English to Australian Indigenous learners. The three topics in this unit investigate how theoretical principles can impact upon syllabus design and materials production.



The unit concludes with the recommendation:

Remember – there is no perfect teaching method in ESL/EFL. Students come from a diversity of backgrounds and have different needs ... you might find that a combination of several methods would be the best way to go to meet the needs of a group of learners with specific needs (Study Guide 2000: 61)

EAL 408 TESL in Practice for Indigenous Learners

This unit addresses the application of theoretical principles learned in EAL 403 and ties together the main ideas presented in the earlier units. In line with the objectives (see Table 1.2), this unit begins with a discussion of the learning styles of Australian Indigenous learners.

The second topic examines the roles of the teacher and the challenges of teaching and living in remote communities. Topics Three and Four deal with the teaching of English in both the spoken and written forms. Topics Five to Seven address the areas of multi-level teaching, team teaching and the choice of resources. The last two topics deal with the relevance of task-based teaching and the linking of content to language in teaching ESL across the curriculum.

EAL 408 works through a teaching-learning model for each sub-topic. The model is aimed at:

- setting you up for learning/enabling you to think in advance about the learning to come (*Pre-reading activity*)
- acquiring some new knowledge on *the topic* (*Readings*)
- accessing this new knowledge (*Deconstruction of the readings*)
- incorporating new knowledge into the knowledge you already have (*Linking*)
- practising using the knowledge (*Applying an aspect*)
- practising ongoing evaluation of your teaching program (*Monitoring*)



- thinking about the positives and the negatives (*Reflecting*)
- recognising what it is you now know (*Recording your personal knowledge growth*) (Study Guide 2000 : 3).

Course students are encouraged to use an ongoing journal to evaluate this teaching-learning model.

Course Implementation

The course was implemented in Term 1, 1998 with a pilot group of twelve teachers from Schools South. Each unit was completed over two school terms. Table 2 demonstrates how the units were staggered over two years. A two-day workshop was run during the October school break: this is compulsory only for teachers from Schools South.

Conclusion

In order to run such a course as described, a number of factors will have to be considered. First, the ESL teacher must be flexible, caring, sensitive to the cultural context and needs of the Indigenous learners. Second, institution and parental support, teachers' skill and commitment and other school factors should demonstrate to the learners that the learning of English is a serious component in the curriculum. Third, the learners' level of maturity, age, motivation, personality, family support and expectations are factors which will affect the selection and design of the types of communicative tasks that can be assigned.

It must be recognised that learning is an ongoing process involving teachers as learners – which, of course, includes learning from students as well.

I conclude with two quotations that have inspired me to develop this PD course:

For me, getting things done, putting ideas and visions into practice would not have been possible without literacy in English. I believe that it is necessary to be able to negotiate with Balanda in the language of

power but to struggle and succeed you need 'double power' : the double power of the Yolngu and the Balanda way. (Yunupingu 1999:4)

It's time we accepted that Islanders need to be taught English with a renewed vigour, with the goal in mind that they need to access the complexity of all that English entails in the modern world. (Nakata, 1999: 14)

Acknowledgements:

I would like to acknowledge and thank my unit writers (Dr Paul Black, Lesley Boyd, Leanne Cook, Associate Professor Brian Devlin, Carlyn Donovan, Ruth Gledhill, Trish Joy, Cecil Nielson, Dale Morgan and Fran Murray) for their commitment to the writing of the units.

References:

Black, P. and Devlin, B. 2000. Study Guide *EAL 410 The Students' First Language in Aboriginal Education*. Darwin: NTU Printery.
 Cooke, L., Gledhill, R. and Morgan, D. 1999. Study Guide *EAL 400 School Culture and the Needs of Indigenous Learners*. Darwin: NTU Printery
 House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 1992.

'Language and culture – a matter of survival.' *Report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Language Maintenance*. Canberra: AGPS
 Murray, F., Joy, T. Boyd, L. and Donovan, C. 2000. Study Guide EAL 408 *TESL in Practice for Indigenous Learners*. Darwin: NTU Printery
 Nakata, M. 1999. History, cultural diversity and English language teaching. Wignell, P. ed. *Double Power*. Melbourne: Language Australia.
 Tan, K. and Nielson, C. 2000. Study Guide EAL 403 *TESL Principles and Indigenous Learners*. Darwin: NTU Printery
 Yunupingu, M. 1999. Double power. In Wignell, P. ed. *Double Power*. Melbourne: Language Australia.

Table 2: Program design

<i>Group 1 Year 1 (1999)</i>				<i>Year 2 (2000)</i>				<i>Year 3 (2001)</i>	
Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 1	Term 2
EAL400	EAL400	EAL410	EAL410 Workshop	EAL403	EAL403	EAL408	EAL408 Workshop		
<i>Group 2</i>									
		EAL400	EAL408 Workshop	EAL403	EAL403	EAL408	EAL408 Workshop	EAL410	EAL410

