

Multicultural matters

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EAL/D provision

Is public education adequately structured and resourced to support our teachers meeting the needs of their newly arrived students, families and communities? Unfortunately, the answer to this question very much depends on where you are located and the age of the students trying to acquire English as an additional language or dialect.

While talking to one primary principal in a regional area recently, she expressed the need to create a new arrivals class to accommodate the more than 20 students spread across K-6, plus those due to arrive over the next 12 months. Having no current staffing entitlement in EAL/D, the school was finding it extremely difficult to adequately meet the needs of these students, being reliant on the short-term New Arrivals Program (NAP) funding and staffing to fill the gap. Long-term structures and programs to meet the ongoing needs of these students cannot be put in place under short-term measures such as these.



The change to English Language Proficiency (ELP) equity loading allocated in 2016 meant that many regional schools were no longer allocated 0.2, or in some cases up to 0.6, as an EAL/D staffing entitlement. They have instead been provided with flexible funding. The result of this has meant that permanent qualified EAL/D teachers have not been able to be appointed to work in this school, or across a number of schools in the area. This trend is replicated across the system for those who have smaller concentrations of newly arrived students.

Furthermore, the impact of this is classroom teachers in many primary and secondary settings are left to pick up the pieces. They are ill-equipped and unqualified to meet the complex educational and psychosocial needs of new arrival students from refugee backgrounds, many of who have significant and complex torture and trauma backgrounds. The teachers want to meet their students' needs and are disturbed by the floundering of the kids in their classes.

While the Department has provided support by way of a Refugee Support Leader, stretched across a number of schools, and provided professional learning, it is not enough. Long-term structures must be put in place which incorporate EAL/D qualified teachers and long-term programs to address the settlement and new arrival needs of these students.

Intensive English Centres

Clearly one of the jewels in the crown of public education, our 14 Intensive English Centres (IECs) and

Intensive English High Schools based in Sydney and Wollongong, provide an ideal setting for students who are newly arrived and require intensive English and settlement programs. Lauded locally, nationally and internationally for their excellence and expertise as a settlement and language public education provision, they have a long and proud history, steeped in Federation's democratic traditions.

Following a study of migrant education concerns, conducted by the then Department of Immigration and the Commonwealth Department of Education and Science in 1969, the Teachers Federation State Council elected a Migrant Education Committee in 1970. This committee prepared a series of recommendations for government as the need for intensive instruction for newly arrived migrants and refugees became increasingly apparent.

On 14 September 1977, the first Intensive Reception and Intensive Learning Centre, called the Bridge House Centre, was established as an annexe of Cleveland Street Boys High School. This site was chosen at Wynyard because of its ease of access to public transport and it opened with a teacher in charge, seven trained ESL teachers, a school counsellor, three aides with bilingual skills and two clerical assistants. It was established to provide Intensive English to students in the then Central Metropolitan Education Region, with students then being fed into 39 local high schools across the region after up to 12 months in the centre.

An additional four centres were announced later that year and they commenced operation at the beginning of the 1978 school year. In 1989, the Directory of Government Schools NSW included the 14 Secondary Intensive Language Centres as specialist schools, which it still does today.

Clearly there remains the need to make significant enhancements to the current IECs in NSW as the state of these centres in many locations are sub-standard. Apart from the appalling conditions in which our teachers are required to teach their curriculum and students to learn, the message to the students and their families of these centres is one of disrespect, disregard and potentially even social marginalisation.

Furthermore, with new regional areas outside of Sydney being targeted as settlement areas by the Department of Immigration, the addition of at least one more IEC outside of Sydney and Wollongong is a must. The inequity faced by teachers, students and their families settling in regional areas cannot be underestimated, especially in relation to resources, class sizes, executive structures and intensive English provisions in Sydney and Wollongong.

Adult Migrant English Program

The Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) provides 510 hours of intensive English language to newly arrived migrants and refugees. TAFE teachers in NSW, in the main, are currently responsible for this educational provision, having won it back following two decades of privatisation. However, private providers continue to dominate significant parts of this provision in other states and territories.

Unfortunately, no sooner had the Morrison government been re-elected, when they moved the AMEP out of the education portfolio into Immigration, under the responsibility of Peter Dutton in the Department of Home Affairs.

The AMEP is currently under review and is described by many as being in crisis. Facing critical issues in its current form, many of which were highlighted by the Federation in its submission in the lead up to the last tendering process in 2017. These matters go to a number of areas, including eligibility, curriculum, class sizes, hours, qualifications and targeted programs for refugee youth.

In 2017, Federation foreshadowed grave concerns for this new model's introduction as it saw the program divided into two streams, namely the Pre-Employment Stream and a Social English Stream. Further, the model detailed that teacher qualifications will no longer be required for students who are enrolled in the Social English Stream, let alone those with expertise in English language acquisition and cross-cultural pedagogies. Graduates from any discipline will now be acceptable and larger class sizes are also part of the new Social English Stream.

The AMEP has always been settlement focused and not remaining as such has been to the program's, and its students', detriment. The shift in focus to an employment program has not only threatened resources for programs without labour market outcomes, but it is failing to ensure that all AMEP students have the English they need to maximise their potential for effective participation in Australian society, as well as employment at their skill level. Further, the employment stream has been unable to address the complex needs of many

new arrivals, particularly students who have multiple needs such as those arriving under the women-at-risk program.

In 2018, youth arrivals aged between 12 and 17 were 41 per cent, with 59 per cent aged 18-24. A system that responds to these English language and settlement needs is paramount.

Failing to do so is to deny these recently arrived young people and their families the necessary key to unlocking a decent future in Australia.

— Amber Flohm, Multicultural Officer/Organiser