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## CPL Podcast: Teaching EAL/D Students K-12

**Host: Carly Boreland**

**With: Joanne Rossbridge and Kathy Rushton**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

You are listening to the JPL Podcast from the Centre for Professional Learning, here is your host Carly Boreland.

### **Carly Boreland:**

Welcome to the JPL podcast for the New South Wales Teacher Federation's Centre for Professional Learning. I'm Carly Boreland and I'm the Editor of the JPL. Today, I'm talking with Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge about approaches to teaching EAL/D learners and we're talking about mainstream classes K-12 and what you can do with the students you have at your school.

So you're back by popular demand! We've already got one podcast with you which is about *Teaching Extended Response Writing' in High Schools [7-12]*. And today we're going to have a chat about English Language learners particularly. And I wanted to start by asking you what it is that makes them different to teach and why it's a specific skill in a mainstream school?

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

I guess first of all, in many ways they're not different to teach but they just come from a different cultural and linguistic background. They bring many resources to the classroom – many valuable resources - and often they speak several languages and have a range of experiences that we can draw upon in the classroom to make connections with their prior learning and what they need to do particularly in an Australian school.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

I am glad to say that the EAL now has a 'D' that stands for 'Dialect'. Many of our Aboriginal students in NSW may not be fluent in the language of their people but they have some of the words and the way they speak English refers back to the language of their people. And some Aboriginal people have talked about their languages 'sleeping' rather than having gone away and I see them waking up all over Sydney. I was listening to the National Anthem being sung in an Aboriginal Language just this week. And I think it's wonderful that we are recognizing, as Joanne said, the resources that students who speak English as a second language or third or fourth language; or who are learning to speak Standard Australian English as another dialect. And speak a wonderful dialect that has a rich cultural background. It's great that we recognise this and they're special children for that reason because I'm an old mono-lingual and I get to learn about the world and about our country through those students. They bring something wonderful to our classrooms.



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### **Carly Boreland:**

Great and I loved how you mentioned diversity because we could easily think that okay we've got maybe an EAL/D class, or maybe we have students who have come to our classroom from different backgrounds, but we sometimes think of them as being homogenous and all needing the same thing.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

Well, that's where money comes into it. Some students might be recognised as having support because they fall into that financial category but if you go back to the research, students need about seven years to develop the English language, academically, at the level that a native speaker of the English language would get to. So, anyone who comes into our schools not speaking Standard Australian English, I think, deserves special support whether they're getting it or not.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

And I also think they are a diverse group within themselves: they may come with limited schooling; they may come with years of schooling in their home country and first language; they might be highly literate; or they may have minimal literacy; and everything in between. And, probably, what's most important is, for us as teachers, to have as much knowledge about the backgrounds of our students as possible. Part of that is communicating with parents; translators; interpreters is all part of this and valuing what students do bring. I find it's amazing [that] sometimes we don't know students might speak another language at home, or another language with grandma, or whatever it may be. Many students, or many people, in Australia do come from language backgrounds that aren't necessarily English and part of that is making everybody feel comfortable being able to share that knowledge as well.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

Jo and I have just written a book, with Dr. Jacqueline D'warte & Dr. Janet Dutton, called '*Tell Me Your Story*' and in there we've used all the strategies, that the four of us could come up with, including a lot of drama strategies, to help teachers work with students who come to the classroom from all those diverse backgrounds. Mainly to help teachers to find out about what linguistic treasures and cultural treasures the students have. And that fits beautifully with the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*, that require us to know how our students learn and who they are. And, (while I'm on that) I think I'll mention another resource that I think is really valuable here because many teachers are going - "ah translators etc. Great! I haven't got any of them - how am I going to find out?" *The Australian Council for TESOL Associations* (which means every TESOL organisation, professional learning group in our states) got together a few years ago (and it was with support from many academics and teachers) to develop elaborations of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* and they're available on *The Australian Council for TESOL Associations* website. And it explains what the job of an EAL/D teacher looks like from *Graduate to Lead*. So, I think that is a really good resource because many EAL/D teachers have said that they don't find their work described well enough because the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* mentions 'Aboriginal students' and mentions 'linguistic diversity' but it's not very explicit about



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what's needed to develop intercultural understandings as well as all the other aspects of learning another language which means learning another way to live.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

We obviously have mainstream teachers but many EAL/D specialists in schools. And, I guess the role of the EAL/D specialist is as an advocate for those students. So, knowing that to be equitable and give people access - community students etc.- is to have access to interpreters is part of that role which is where looking at standards and elaborations and so on is really important.

### **Carly Boreland:**

There are so many things that I'm hearing and the first one that came through was just your voices as soon as you start talking, and I'm glad you mentioned an advocate, because you can hear that in your voice. As soon as you get to know these students you obviously feel like you want to do things to help them more and that you're on their side. But, at the same time that's such a common thing for, like you pointed out with [the] *Teaching Standards*' 'knowing your students'. So, there are some things about working with EAL/D students that are just exactly the same as for all students. But, then there's some things where we probably need to emphasise that it is a special skill and there should be specialist teachers.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

Yes, and can I just make the point? I use the term, and you just used it then, Carly, '*specialist teachers*'; they're often referred to as "*support teachers*". And somebody taught me this many years ago because, I was, at the time, called an ESL teacher, and they told me "you're not a support teacher, you're a specialist teacher". As soon as I was told that, things changed: because that person is a *specialist teacher* and they are there, particularly, to show expertise to support students in developing their language, in English, but also having knowledge of cultural background etc.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

And, their role's two-fold: it's not just helping the students themselves in a class – a special class and often in high schools there's an EAL/D class - it's what they bring to help a mainstream classroom teacher develop materials and a pedagogy that supports EAL/D students. But I know that Joanne and I will cheer together when we say that EAL/D pedagogy is the *best* pedagogy for *everyone* - all students - because it's based on understanding how language helps you learn and that means, by definition, an EAL/D specialist has linguistic understanding.

### **Carly Boreland:**

Can I ask you more about that? I wanted to ask you particularly. So we're saying (because this comes up often) we've got students who might be from Aboriginal backgrounds [as well as] students with special learning needs and disabilities and we keep hearing the same thing of that "what's good for them is good for everybody" and that we can change our teaching practice in some ways. I had an example I



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wanted to ask you about, and you can tell me what you think. It's been suggested to me that say, as an example, in an English classroom (where you've got an EAL/D teacher assisting with the pedagogy of a teacher who has a mainstream class) that one approach, that's often used in English classrooms, is that say you're studying a book (a novel) and often you'll study the book and as a bit of a reward, at the end, you might watch the video. And maybe there is a movie about that book, so you watch that as a reward. But it was suggested to me what's helpful for EAL/D students is if you watch the movie first because then they get the story and then they can read the book. Is that the kind of flipping that could be useful or what do you think?

### **Kathy Rushton:**

Well I would suggest to you, "do you speak Finnish, Carly?" Probably not! If we were studying a novel in Finnish it would probably be easier for you if you watched before you tried to wade your way through it. Far from that, the sort of suggestions, in the book I was talking about before, and in all the wonderful resources, that I'm sure. They always say, use everything you can to help develop understanding. It's about *meaning making!* So, any of you who visited another country, where you don't speak the language, if you can get a picture, or name something, you can order a glass of wine if you can act it out, or point to the bottle. But, after that, if they are not in context, it's very, very difficult. So, what we would suggest is that you wouldn't be reading a novel - you'd be reading excerpts from a novel or with a companion picture book, or showing the video first, or nowadays, you'd be reading a graphic novel, or the graphic novel version to give as much support as you could. But, really the essence isn't just these strategies - its understanding about language - how it develops.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

I would say the example of the novel, or whatever the text is, and the movie - it doesn't mean we just put the movie on and watch the whole movie and then go "now we're going to read the novel". It might be that you refer to the movie (certain scenes) to accompany the reading of the novel. It might be that you show the scenes to tap into student's background knowledge and develop their current language - tap into their current language - and then bring that to the written text. It's all *text* but what's your *purpose*, and what can you use these texts for, in a sequence, to go from where the students are? Develop their *language* and *oral language* and then move into *reading* and then *writing*. And also *context*, you know the *cultural and historical context of text*, where does that come from? Don't assume students have heard (if you take the secondary context) of Shakespeare or Harry Potter. Western cultures are quite familiar with them - "oh, yes, we know what that means!" Even if I haven't read any Shakespeare or Harry Potter, I've still got some images in my head. But there might need to be quite a bit of work done around *context* before even watching the movie, or the book, or the picture book.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

And key there is '*knowing your students*' because all of those factors, about their educational linguistic backgrounds, are so key to understanding where-to-next. Definitely what you can tap into, and what is engaging, for instance, some students depending on what they've been through in terms of their own



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life experiences might not be fluently speaking a language - they might have a couple of dialects of that language - and we can't be expected to understand. In many of our schools there are 85 languages and the research has shown to develop your first language, and then a second, it's always good to have teaching in that first language and to become literate in it – well we can't give that either. So knowing that (just those few things) can help you decide why you would act this way rather than that way with particular students to support them and what selection of texts you might make.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

And then once you've selected texts - *knowing your texts*. If I know the novel or the picture book, really well then I'll know what parts of that movie to maybe focus on and what parts I may not. If I don't know my texts, I actually can't make those decisions and I can't connect those texts to my students. So, I always try and get teachers to read their texts numerous times before deciding what to do with them.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

So, key to everything is: *know your students* and *know your job!* Because you can't be across everything, that's why specialist trained EAL/D teachers can be, as Jo said, "gold" because they can help a mainstream teacher choose this way, rather than that, to support particular students and experience, of course, comes in there as well. So, wherever we're working, we tend to have waves of migrants in different places. And you'll learn about that culture; (if you're a keen teacher) you'll develop some understandings about the students you're working with.

### **MUSICAL INTERLUDE/ANNOUNCEMENT:**

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### **Carly Boreland:**

So, my experience was in an Illawarra area, where there were big groups of students from Slavic backgrounds, and you did tend to know things about particular cultures. And at that time, there were a lot of Lebanese and Turkish students and so you could hook in like that. I wanted to ask you, (well I've got so many questions I want to ask you) but one thing I wanted to ask is you is - where do you start? So, if our listener's a classroom teacher, they come to school and they've got a student in a mainstream classroom, have we got some kind of first points of reference? Obviously, we're saying you have to get to know the student - and that's just a priority. But, are there then some things that can be happening at same time as looking for your EAL/D support? Are there other things you should be tapping into, or suggesting at your school, that we're looking at?

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

Reading, as a teacher! Professional reading is a place to start. There are many books, that will help you in terms of pedagogy, but then also, in terms of *knowing your students*. If, it is about *knowing your students*,





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PETAA (Primary English Teaching Association of Australia) has a book by Margery Hartzberg called *Teaching English Language Learners in Mainstream Classes*. The first two chapters (I think) are about identifying your students, looking at their needs etc. There are also many other texts around using EAL/D pedagogy which would be [useful] - again, Margery's book; and (I guess it's now a bit of an oldie but a goodie) *Designing Learning for Diverse Classrooms* by Paul Dufficy, (that's also a PETAA book); and Pauline Gibbons has had a book for quite a while. There's a second edition out called *Scaffolding Language; Scaffolding Learning*; and a then much older book (which is again PETAA) which is *Learning to Learn in a Second Language*. They would be the first places I would go to for professional reading. And then also, in terms of teaching about language in particular not excluding; it depends on whether we are talking new arrivals or not. New arrivals is one thing, but you could have a class of 30 students in Year 4 who 90% of them started Kindergarten with no English.

### Carly Boreland:

And from tremendously diverse backgrounds, I can imagine, which would be amazing but then there's lots of things ...

### Joanne Rossbridge:

Yes, so there's a whole range of different factors. You could have a classroom where you've got two new arrival students and everyone speaks English only and they all represent different challenges. So, I go back to *knowing your learners* but then knowing and maybe even identifying things you need to know about your learners. It doesn't sound like rocket science does it but I think it is.

### Carly Boreland:

Can you take us through that? Because I think there's a benefit in not over assuming that teachers remember everything they learnt at University, or that everyone learns the same things.

### Kathy Rushton:

Most people don't remember anything they learnt at University. On terms of resources the best resources are humans. And if you're lucky enough to be in a school that has translators or Community Liaison Officers or people who volunteer from the community, they're really the very best people to talk to, or other colleagues in the school who share the home language or cultural background of some of the students. They can help you understand things that maybe you don't even know to ask about. I think for instance, I'll give a good one here, that some students and their families do not want you to know what language they speak at home because they feel that it's going to be detrimental to them. And, maybe if you're not from a cultural background like theirs, you don't even know that that's happening. So that's what an EAL/D teacher can help you to understand and can navigate and can make the families, and the students, feel included in the school and make real contact between the home and the school. And I think the sort of comment where people say "they never come up to the school", "they don't read with the kids", "they're not interested" is just so far from the truth. That's our culture where we do those things. Go to France, they don't do that. And, especially the sort of students



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Jo's mentioned, who maybe their parents have had a very bad experience at school, or have had no experience of school, or have no understanding about Australian culture. I've had very literate adults, who were newly arrived in Australia, asking me - "what's all this raffle ticket business?" They just didn't understand what was going on in a school that they're being asked for money for a raffle? That, and try explaining the Melbourne Cup. Whereas we just say "yes, we understand that!" So, just this honouring of the linguistic and cultural diversity in Australia, that's Numero Uno - Step number one: to at least recognise that the majority, almost, of Australians blew in. I'm a first generation; and most people don't pick that because of what I look like. So many, many Australians have Anglicised their names; not quite buried, but sometimes buried, their past because they felt, or their grandfather felt, or their mother felt, that was the best way for them to get on in this new country. So, I think it's about time we called a halt to that and say, "you brought a lot of good stuff here; let's honour it and thank you".

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

Maybe it's more about basic principles, or beliefs, because that will determine the kinds of conversations that happen in classrooms. So if you believe that maintaining Language One (or maintaining Language "1 2 or 3") will support acquisition of English that will have an impact on what happens in classrooms. Students will be able to use their first language.

### **Carly Boreland:**

How do you make that clear to kids,? How do you show that is encouraged and welcomed?

### **Kathy Rushton:**

Like this "san toki toki-ya, geudaereul gehun-yah?" I'm singing about the "*Mountain Rabbit*" in Korean. Can I speak Korean? No. Do I know what those words mean? No. But Koreans, that I've sung it to, assured me my accent is perfect. I've learnt what I can from my students, and colleagues, so that you can sing, say hello, get bilingual texts. I am mono-lingual and, believe me, I've tried to be bilingual - very hard but I haven't managed it. But I think its respect for other languages; from what Jo said, its principles. And if you can say hello - and everyone can now, we've got all of those apps that translate for you. I can make crying Koreans laugh with that song because they go "who is singing that". I think that's what you need to do is show you have respect for their language and that English learning and literacy is not the most important thing to you. The most important thing to you, as a teacher, is to honour their background and (Jo used the word 'belief' I'm going to say) '*understanding*' because the research shows that that is true. So, if you're not able to help them in their first language we have already let them down so let's get set about trying to help them in whatever way we can after that.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

I can give you another concrete example with some students who were looking at natural disasters like earthquakes. And there were images of earthquakes and all the drama that goes on around them. And, what was interesting, because of where the students had come from in the world, they had vast



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experience of earthquakes, teachers hadn't! So they were able to talk with each other (they were talking in Arabic) about their experiences, prior to coming to Australia, which then resulted in switching between their first language and English. And the teachers were like "you know all this stuff; you just don't know it in English!" But suddenly they've got the knowledge – it's only a language issue; it's not about not having knowledge; and, again, its tapping into that. It could be quite easy to stop that conversation, and I've seen that happen too! But, if we did that, think about what's lost: loss of knowledge of what students have to share; loss of students feeling able to share; comments on, not just on their knowledge on earthquakes, but their own cultural linguistic background. There are a whole lot of messages based on the conversations we let continue, or stop. Little things like that actually matter.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

I think it's a really important point; those experiences! There's a beautiful book that I've read to many students called '*Greener Than An Emerald*' by Jean Chapman". Because my family is from Fiji, I've got a hurricane story. But when I've read it with students, every child whose background is from the Pacific, the Philippines, (anywhere where the hurricane happens) is engaged and wants to tell me their story. And I think that's what we forget too, is telling each other our stories; that our language is a culture; and it's your family. So that if we can tap into that we can get engagement from the students and we therefore can help them to develop their English Literacy because that's our job – we know that's what we want to do. By helping them share their story and use their own language, they can use their first language, or dialect, but tell us about their experience. That's really important: it can be about the earthquake; it can be about the hurricane; but it links in. And it's surprising for a lot of mainstream teachers because they haven't thought that way – it's just a little flip on thinking about what that child's got and how you can help them share it with the class in a proud way.

### **Carly Boreland:**

Can we talk a bit more then, about family? Because we've talked a bit about families and how we want to make them feel comfortable, and welcomed, and can get a lot of information out of them that can then help us at school. What are we communicating with parents about what happens at home or how parents can help at home? Is there sort of anything that would be a general principle (or that we would think about) maybe about how they would use language at home?

### **Kathy Rushton:**

I would think the main thing is to get parents to know that we respect their culture and their linguistic heritage as well. That's Number 1. So rather than us asking them to do things; we should be offering. And I think in that way - their stories [are important]. I saw a wonderful example, in a primary school just this week, where a trained EAL/D teacher had filmed parents with suitcase stories (and in the suitcase they had special things that meant something to them) and they talked about it. Some of them in their first language - some of them in English! It was beautiful! It was a really simple idea that a trained EAL/D teacher managed. And that way, of course the parents are engaged with the school; the school is honouring their background - saying "you're important; you've got the language!" And I





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think, in that way, inviting parents into the school to bring something from their culture not just a plate of food.

**Carly Boreland:**

And to tell their stories and to value their language!

**Kathy Rushton:**

It's a key thing.

**Joanne Rossbridge:**

Another example I saw, this year, was students making their own immigration stories or about family members and they had a day where they all shared these and parents were invited. And you actually had parents in tears for several reasons: but so proud of what their students had done but also so emotional that their stories were acknowledged. They were seeing their students' stories acknowledged as school and then suddenly their stories become important as well. So again, they're not groundbreaking things; they're just sensible things. It's about being inclusive and acknowledging everybody's stories.

**Kathy Rushton:**

Or you can just say to every child (because they're the best ambassador for the school) – “can you go home and ask Mum and Dad, or your carer, to tell you a story from home? And then if you can tell it in mum and dad or grandma's language, great! Or, if you could get some words, great! It can be a funny story; or a sad story; it could be a recipe. Bring it in to school and then we'll do a drama activity like 'Readers' Theatre' so you could tell the story to a pair. And then we'll help you decide which story would make the best play; because we'll work out together some criteria for what makes a good play. This is Year 8, this is Year 7”

Or, hey! What an idea! - 'Slam Poetry'. Any of that going on? Any wonderful Australian slam poets, from different cultural backgrounds and diverse range? Any YouTube that you want to get on and write slam poetry you'll see them[there]. Allowing students to develop their own stories in a poetic form and perform them. And that's standard mainstream but we've got to think - did we bring the first language into the classroom? Did we allow it? Did we welcome it? Did we support it?

So mono-linguals can do this! People without EAL/D training can do this! It's thinking another way about what supports English Language learning. So I say, and most teachers would agree, engagement and 'storying' (especially telling stories from your own background) seems to engage everybody.

**Carly Boreland:**

Can I ask you about these multi-cultural days? And I want to do this in a way that is respectful and appreciative of people's best intentions and good will, but I understand that sometimes, despite all those things, we are not always doing that in the best ways and that maybe sometimes we're a little bit superficial or prone to stereotypes. Is that worth talking about in the context of EAL/D learners?



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### **Kathy Rushton:**

Take my own family: I was born here; my parents migrated here; my father spoke 3 languages (that I know about) plus English; my mother only spoke English. I didn't need any special help like that. But I know, when I watched the suitcase stories this week, it was the one from Fiji - and the Hindi speaking one - that made me go "ah they're mine" because that's kind of the cultural background I've got. So when you're talking about what engages you on 'Multi-cultural Day' you're usually engaged by the people that are representing you. The teachers putting it on, if they're doing it for that reason - to make different community groups in the school feel welcome and special - great! But, this is not the core business that we're talking about. We're talking about how to put this in a classroom every day, put it in programs that are recommended by the school, and fit the criteria what we're trying to do teaching according to the Syllabus and teaching Maths, English and PDHP; teaching all of these things. How do we do that?

I'm saying, you can bring the first language into the classroom and achieve those goals.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

Maybe if you have a school culture that is inclusive you don't need Multicultural Day.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

Or, you have it because it's a special event? My colleagues who do this best, they know what their school needs. But in terms of how you can support EAL/D students, it's about changing the culture in your classroom. And you can do that tomorrow by saying to the students exactly what I said to you - "Bring in a story from home, something that's special to your family and use any language you'd like to tell it. We can get a narrator, or you can tell us what it means afterwards."

### **Carly Boreland:**

So, first things that we need to remember, when we're teaching EAL/D students, is that they're our students and we need to know them really well. And we need to try and create schools where people come to our school and feel included and welcome from the moment they step in the door. And when we are thinking about EAL/D students especially, that can be using the enrollment process as an opportunity to get lots of information, in a respectful and appreciative way, of the family. And that might mean using some of the translation and other resources and not assuming that they know what we're talking about; but trying to get things from them. It means taking some time to improve ourselves which is reading and accessing resources that are relevant to the students that we're teaching and also tapping into the human resources be they: our colleagues and EAL/D specialists; the parents; the other people in the school; other services that should be in our communities that we can access. And, really valuing what the student brings to our classroom - particularly valuing their first language, and their family's first languages, and the stories that come with those. Does that sound about right?



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### **Kathy Rushton:**

Just two things if you wouldn't mind. The people that you talked about. I think two important terms, that are used across Australia, are Inter-cultural Officer or Community Liaison Officer, so they're not just somebody; they are really important people.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

The other point I would make is the value of *oral language*. Because, if we're not practising our language *orally*, then we are probably not going to develop our language as quickly as we can (especially in terms of literacy). All classrooms need to be places where *talk* is happening all the time. It's not just teacher talk: its talk to teachers; with teachers; with students, across groups etc. But *talk* for a purpose and that *talk* is designed into sequences of learning to move students along the continuum from oracy to literacy if you like.

### **Kathy Rushton:**

And, to understand the importance of the use of the first language in that move. This is not just about inclusivity, it's about developing English.

### **Joanne Rossbridge:**

Because, if you know how one language works, then you can apply language (English language) on top of that. It's an amazing resource; so we need to use that.

### **Carly Boreland:**

So we're about *oral* language, developing literacy and doing that through an appreciation of the culture and the values and the people who come to our classrooms. Joanne, Kathy, thank you so much for your insights today. We really appreciate having you here and we hope that our listeners do too.

You've been listening to the JPL podcast for the NSW Teachers Federation Centre for Professional Learning. I'm Carly Boreland, and I'm the Editor of the JPL. I've been talking with Kathy Rushton and Joanne Rossbridge about teaching EAL/D learners in your classrooms. And to find out more and to listen to further podcasts you can visit our website at [cpl.asn.au/podcasts](http://cpl.asn.au/podcasts).

### **CONCLUSION:**

The JPL Podcast is produced by the Centre for Professional Learning and the New South Wales Teachers Federation. All opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the individual speakers, and do not necessarily represent the views of their employer or associated organisations. The host was Carly Boreland; technical direction by Jason Nicholas.

***Kathy Rushton*** has worked as a literacy consultant, ESL and classroom teacher with the DEC (NSW), and in a range of other educational institutions. She is interested in the development of literacy, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged communities with students learning English as an



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additional language or dialect. Kathy is currently a lecturer in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney.

*Joanne Rossbridge* is an independent literacy consultant working in both primary and secondary schools and with teachers across Sydney. She has worked as a classroom and ESL teacher and literacy consultant with the DEC (NSW). Much of her experience has involved working with students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Joanne is particularly interested in student and teacher talk and how talk about language can assist the development of language and literacy skills.