

The new EAL curriculum in Victoria explicitly acknowledges the value of students being able to draw on their existing linguistic knowledge in the classroom. It is organised in three sub-strands: Communication, Cultural and plurilingual awareness, Linguistic structures and features.

In the Cultural and Plurilingual awareness sub-strand, teachers can find specific suggestions on how to engage with the multilingualism of their classes in order to support the linguistic development of EAL and non-EAL students.

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EAL Curriculum

[www.victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au](http://www.victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au)

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For more information about EAL students and linguistic diversity in the Languages classroom please visit [www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/research-unit-for-multilingualism-and-cross-cultural-communication/community/linguistic-diversity-in-schools](http://www.arts.unimelb.edu.au/research-unit-for-multilingualism-and-cross-cultural-communication/community/linguistic-diversity-in-schools)



**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

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A blue-toned illustration of a diverse group of people walking in various directions, representing a multicultural community. The figures are stylized and semi-transparent, creating a sense of movement and interaction.

# LANGUAGES PROGRAMS AND EAL STUDENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE BENEFITS

This brochure is about the benefits of having students with English as an Additional Language (EAL) in our Languages programs, and how language teachers can tap into the existing linguistic expertise of these students.

### Who are English as Additional Language (EAL) students?

EAL students are students with various levels of English, who also know at least one other language before they enter our schools. The number of EAL students continues to increase in our classrooms, and they have a wide range of language backgrounds and family histories. They may, for instance, be born and raised in Australia, or they may have only recently arrived from overseas.

Traditionally EAL students have often been defined as students who in some way lack ability in English and need to improve their English in order to fully participate in mainstream education. For this reason, they are sometimes excluded from Languages programs, such as French, Italian or Chinese, with the idea that they should focus only on their English language skills.

However, research shows that exposing them to an additional language in the Languages classroom and supporting them to maintain their home languages may enhance their whole linguistic development. After all, they are competent language users and learners given their previous experience. This fact can become an asset in the Languages classroom and a means to improve their overall schooling experience.



### Multilingualism as a resource.

EAL students, as multilinguals, bring strengths to the Languages classroom through:

- their experience of and exposure to multiple languages,
- their linguistic and cultural awareness,
- their identity and practices as multilingual speakers.

All of these elements can help EAL students to learn another language more effectively, to participate more actively in class and to model language learning for students who have not previously been exposed to any language other than English.

EAL students and language knowledge.

### EAL students may know:

- one or more home languages,
- English,
- other languages learnt during their schooling and life, and
- the language they are currently learning in a Languages program at school.



The benefits of having EAL students in the Languages classroom:

### 1. EAL students tend to demonstrate greater ability to learn additional languages.

Research suggests that multilingual learners have an advantage in learning additional languages. Based on their previous experience of learning, practising and being exposed to more than one language, they often notice similarities between languages, which facilitates pronunciation and makes grammar and words easier to understand. This may contribute to a deeper engagement in their language lessons at school, helping EAL students to develop a positive sense of identity and increased confidence in their language abilities.



### 2. EAL students start learning the additional language at the same level as their peers.

EAL students can struggle to adjust to the school experience as their English skills vary when they start schooling in Australia. However, research indicates that in Languages classes, EAL students are at the same level as their classmates who only know English (or even have an advantage). The success of EAL students in learning additional languages can enhance their self-perception as successful students and competent learners. The Languages classroom can be a place where the knowledge they bring to school is recognised and valued by teachers, peers, family and the wider school community, thus boosting their confidence, motivation and engagement in the learning process at school.

### 3. Teachers can use EAL students' knowledge of other languages in their teaching practice.

Language teaching is moving from a monolingual mindset that focuses on one language at a time to approaches which recognise that individuals are able to access and use a set of different linguistic skills in order to communicate and make sense of their world.

Language teachers can recognise and draw on the linguistic experience and practices of EAL students by acknowledging their linguistic background as a resource, by helping them to maintain connections with their home languages, by making comparisons between languages, and by reflecting on the use of languages in different contexts and for different purposes (these are known as **plurilingual pedagogies**). Language teachers play an important role in supporting the linguistic development of EAL students.

### 4. Learning an additional language can have a positive impact on EAL students' English.

Research indicates that EAL students enrolled in Languages programs can enhance their skills not only in the program language but also in English. By learning an additional language, EAL students gain a deeper understanding about how languages function and how they are acquired, enhancing their understanding of the ways in which language skills are transferrable across languages, including English.



## 5. The plurilingual space of a Languages classroom is enriched by the languages that EAL students bring with them.

The Languages classroom is by default a space where at least two languages are visible and actively used: the program language and English. EAL students can further enrich this linguistically engaging

environment by sharing their languages with their peers. By transferring their language skills and awareness to the classroom, EAL students can support their own and their classmates' understanding of how languages work. This is a valuable experience for EAL students as well as for non-EAL students, who in this way are exposed to a rich multilingual and multicultural context.

## Simple strategies for teachers

Some simple strategies to engage with and foster EAL students in your Languages program include the following:

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Make sure you include EAL students in language learning activities.

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Provide positive feedback and engage EAL students as 'language experts'.

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Give EAL students a chance to share their personal language knowledge as well as broader linguistic knowledge with the class.

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Pay attention to the strategies EAL students may be using in the classroom.

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Help students find connections between the program language, English, their languages and languages other students may have.

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Use activities to investigate the language background and practices of the students, such as: language learning interviews, language maps, or identity texts.

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Make the program language, English and the EAL students' languages visible on classroom walls.

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More information about some of these strategies and how to implement them is available at the **RUMACCC Website**.

