

Utilizing Community Resources

There are many activities which help maximize language potential in mixed background classes and help students access community resources. These resources include everything that is available within the school, but also multimedia offers (radio, TV), activities (drama and music groups, festivals), public spaces (shops, cafés) or the interaction with community members. Some ideas on how community resources can be used are:

- visits to day care centers for the elderly where students engage in conversations with elderly people of the appropriate language background;
- an electronic newsletter (perhaps one each semester) in which small teams of students (preferably a combination of students with and without a home background in the language) across all year levels take on different tasks, such as designing the newsletter, writing up short articles, and editing. The articles may be on varying topics related to community resources, such as music, singers and clubs; films and videos; festivals; shopping, restaurants and food; jokes and a report of the school's languages concert.
- pre-planned shopping expeditions to businesses conducted in the community or home language.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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DIVERSITY IN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

This flyer explains how diversity in classrooms and the concept of language sharing help language learners in reaching their full potential.

Diversity and Language Sharing

Some languages, such as Arabic, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Mandarin, and Spanish, are of economic and strategic importance to Australia. These languages are frequently taught in schools. However, with over 30% of Melbourne's population speaking a language other than English at home, the city is a diverse environment with many speakers of these languages. They provide valuable language sharing resources for learners and the fact that these languages are widely used in Australia offers another motivation for students to learn and communicate with others in the language. Language sharing happens when people who have more background in a language and already speak it well, teach those who have less proficiency in the language.

Language sharing provides:

- an opportunity for learners to hear the language being used in a natural way,
- increases confidence in those sharing a language with others,
- facilitates conversations between people of different backgrounds in the language.

Different Learner Types

It is a widely held but misinformed belief that there are two clear-cut groups of students in our language programs: 'native' and 'non-native', or 'first language' and 'second language' learners. Our research has demonstrated just how much more complex the situation in language programs is.

Different Backgrounds, Different Needs

Students from any of these backgrounds can achieve success in learning a language. However, depending on their background they may have different needs.

For example:

- those who speak a second language at home may 'mix' languages, which could make their speech unclear. These students need support to improve their vocabulary and grammar;
- some may speak a dialect and need help to adjust to the standard language of the classroom, for example, Sicilian to Standard Italian;
- others might experience that learning to write takes longer than learning to speak the language. They might require more help with orthography;

Students with an active family background in the language will have an advantage in oral comprehension and speaking over those without a background in the language. The challenge is to develop programs which cater for all student types.

Our multilingual environment provides opportunities to utilise community resources, for example:

- within the school (with other students);
- through institutions which can support home bilingualism and school language learning, such as radio, television, press, after hours classes, drama and music groups, festivals, shops, guest houses and cafés;
- through interaction with people (especially elderly people and tourists) who will in turn also benefit in turn from this interaction.

