

About the Languages & Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC)

By Ruth Woolven

Snapshot

Ruth Woolven, the Manager/ Librarian of the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre shares with us the amazing array of resources available to all schools through this wonderful library.

Where it all started

The Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre (LMERC) in Victoria is a Department of Education (DE) specialised library originally established in the 1980s to support newly arrived migrants in Richmond. The Richmond Community Education Centre closed in 1987 and the resources were moved into the Statewide Multicultural Education Coordination Unit. In 1991 it merged with the Ethnic Schools Resource Centre to be known as MERC. After the release of the Department's *LOTE Strategy Plan* in 1993 the name was changed to LMERC.

Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre

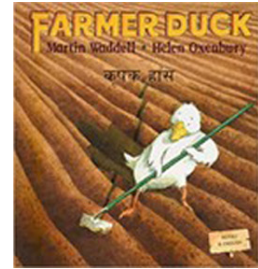
The [library](#) now provides resources to all educators across the state covering the areas of:

- Languages
- English as an additional language (EAL)
- Multicultural Education and global education
- Intercultural capability
- Cross-curriculum priorities
 - » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
 - » Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
 - » Sustainability.

There are academic and practical teacher resources; culturally inclusive fiction and non-fiction; games and storytelling kits, realia...

The collection is contemporary, diverse and responsive to changing needs.

There are academic and practical teacher resources; culturally inclusive fiction and non-fiction; games and storytelling kits, realia (cultural objects such as puppets, masks, clothes and toys) and so much more.



LMERC's borrowers are teachers and other staff who come from all sectors – early childhood, primary and secondary, rural and metropolitan, adult education, pre-service and post-graduate teachers.

Tertiary staff often bring in groups of pre-service teachers providing opportunity to see our varied resources.

There are more than 60 languages available in the collection, for both mainstream and community language classrooms.

Borrowers usually have a term long loan and can request resources on themes and topics.

Our staff are responsive to educator needs, providing advice on resources, suppliers and other sources of information. LMERC produces a newsletter twice a term, sharing new resources, relevant professional learning and journal articles and curated lists.

Borrower feedback

When resources are returned to the library, we seek feedback from our borrowers regarding the impact of the resources on learning and wellbeing. Some of the feedback comments are included throughout this article in italics.

Our borrowers are educators, so we select resources that can be used in all sorts of educational settings to supplement and enhance the teaching of the curriculum. This could include resources that may be beyond the scope (and budget) of many schools and their libraries. Some schools use our resources as a 'try before you buy' service.

Being able to borrow resources gives me more flexibility with topic selection as I'm not restricted by what is in the school library.

Exposing our students to a variety of texts is very important. The LMERC library contains resources which we don't have at school.

Gave me great resources that we wouldn't have without the library. I was able to give students books in their own language that helped to celebrate and validate their home language giving them a vital link between home and school learning.

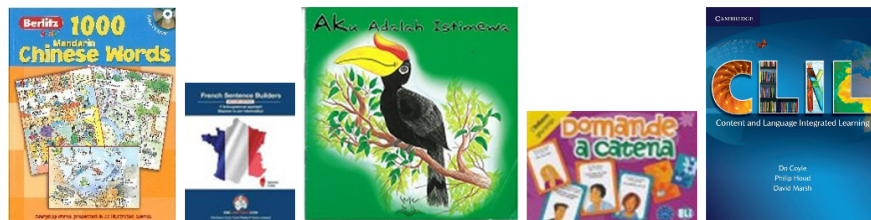
The students have been able to share books with non-English speaking family members for the first time, they are now able to do home reading.

Library collection

There are more than 60 languages available in the collection, for both mainstream and community language classrooms. For the languages taught in mainstream schools and community language classrooms, the collections are extensive including textbooks, activity books, games and cultural resources. There are resources for a variety of language teaching approaches, strategies and methods. These include Content and Language Integrated Language (CLIL); Total Physical Response (TPR) and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS).

The library has a collection of folk tales written in accessible Japanese. I am always looking for Japanese stories that are written simply, in an accessible way for my primary level learner. Regular Japanese picture books generally do not contain accessible language.

Plurilingual awareness



The Victorian Curriculum F-10 EAL includes a strand called [Cultural and Plurilingual Awareness](#). This strand builds on a wide body of research into second and additional language acquisition. Students will have improved learning outcomes and feel valued if they are recognised as speakers of multiple languages rather than a 'deficit' view as non-English speaking. Plurilingual awareness refers to a person's ability to use their knowledge of different languages in the learning of another language. Teachers do not need to share their students' languages to use plurilingual strategies. Some of these strategies are using vocabulary charts displaying multiple languages, using bilingual dictionaries or home language books. (DE, 2019).

LMERC is able to provide resources in many languages to support newly arrived students with home language proficiency and plurilingual awareness. Bilingual dictionaries and picture books, some with portable digital devices that 'read' the story, are popular.

The bilingual books scaffolded and enhanced student learning while valuing their first language.

The students have been able to share books with non-English speaking family members for the first time, they are now able to do home reading. They feel like the other kids, it was pretty special.

To have access to quality diverse and multilingual texts is very important and greatly assists being able to teach the breadth of the curriculum. I recently borrowed and returned various bilingual story books for a school-wide Harmony Day story session.

Parents and students read stories in the home language to groups of students. This is an annual event that our school community loves. Amazingly, I was able to borrow books in Shona, as well as more commonly spoken languages in Melbourne (Somali, Arabic, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, Persian). Reading and hearing stories in their home language is affirming for those students and exposes all other students to linguistic diversity at our school and in Melbourne.

Bilingual books are so useful. There are 25 different, shifting languages at our school.

Student engagement was great. The CALD literature titles were especially appreciated by students and staff as these were not then readily available at my school. I have now purchased many of these because I saw the positive impact they had on student engagement and appreciation of stories from other perspectives.

[Guidance](#) from the Department of Education also includes having home language texts available in the classroom book box for independent reading time for EAL/D students. For older students who can read fluently in their home language we can also provide monolingual home language novels, thus providing some rest from the hard work of mastering a new language.

The bilingual texts validate students' home languages, give them familiarity and a respite from their new language, and allow them to share their culture and language knowledge with others.

Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross curriculum priority

LMERC has a carefully curated collection to support the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories & Cultures cross curriculum priority](#). Expertise and advice were sought from Koorie Outcomes Division, the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages, Koorie Engagement Support staff and Catholic education Koorie education support staff in establishing this collection. Wherever possible we seek to buy Koorie (Victorian Aboriginal) content and resources written or produced by First Nation's authors and organisations.

Realia

The collection has many pieces of realia such as musical instruments, games, wall hangings, puppets, Kamishibai theatres, masks and food.



Borrowing the Chinese waist drums for students' cultural learning has a significant impact on student learning outcomes. It provides an engaging, hands-on experience that deepens their understanding of Chinese culture. This interactive approach not only enhances their knowledge but also fosters a greater appreciation for diversity, leading to more well-rounded and culturally aware students.

The hands-on tools were the most useful resources. They provided students with an interactive and engaging way to learn, making the cultural lessons more memorable and impactful. These types of resources are invaluable for fostering active participation and deeper understanding in the classroom.

Support for teaching and learning

The collection provides the opportunity for educators to read the latest research on the teaching of EAL, Languages and inclusive pedagogies. Educators may also have students who are refugees and have experienced trauma and/or disrupted schooling.

When asked how using the resources impacted their own learning some of the responses included:



Extremely helpful, current and scaffolded to assist both myself and my students.

The resources have been helpful for planning the units and lessons, but also as content included in the lessons themselves. The resources from the LMERC have made planning and teaching languages a lot easier for me as a graduate student. Merci!

I mainly use them for my own learning to help plan professional development for staff. I also shared them with teachers new to EAL and they used them both for their own learning and to help plan teaching and learning for students.

Textbooks on the methodology of teaching English as an additional language, textbooks on grammar as well as student activity books we're the most useful for me.

The variety of the resources i.e. grammar, comprehension, listening programmes, cultural information, big books and puppet packs etc have certainly contributed to the depth and richness of my programmes and therefore improved learning outcomes.

LMERC is able to provide resources in many languages to support newly arrived students with home language proficiency and plurilingual awareness.

Many feedback responses highlight the benefits to student learning from having access to bilingual texts but the following comments also highlight the wellbeing aspects of using resources that reflect the diversity of the students' backgrounds.



Catering to diverse needs requires both teacher identification and implementation for effective differentiation. When all students can benefit from differentiated pathways then success, progress and wellbeing become enhanced.

Reading texts in students first language is very affirming for students. This year, we also had older students reading to younger students in their first language. This was great for recently arrived students who speak very little English, they finally had a voice. Also great for students who spend weekends studying their home language. It showed that learning Chinese is valuable and there is a place for it.

The students were excited to see items that were familiar to their identities and culture and share them with their peers.

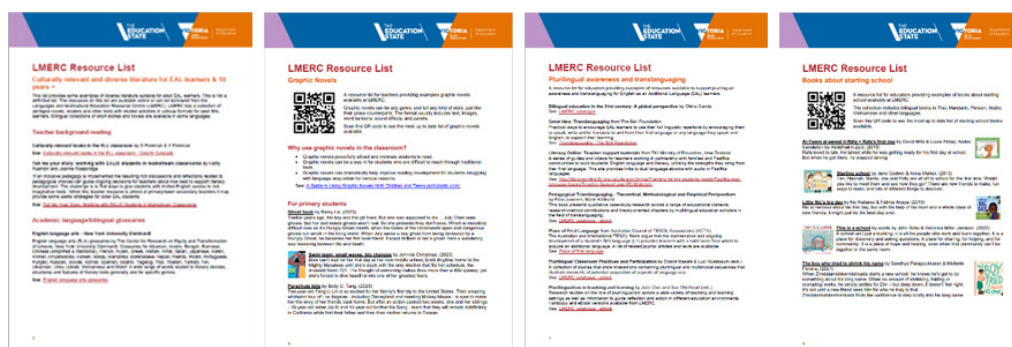
Student became happier, having access to words and being able to communicate with teacher and classmates. She did not want to stay at home even on the holidays, even came to school on curriculum day. She was so excited to learn. It was so inspiring.

Curated lists

LMERC offers curated [reading lists](#) and [LearnPath](#) pages within the library catalogue. We also produce quick reference lists for many topics including free, online resources that will particularly support EAL students and teachers.

Maintaining a dynamic collection

One challenge for us is keeping up to date with changing immigration patterns and trends, as LMERC is often contacted by teachers with newly arrived students with little English. The [EAL Annual Report](#) provides information on newly arrived students by language and country of



birth which can assist our resources planning. However, we also need to respond to requests from sudden changes.

For example, in 2022, when many families escaping conflict, arrived in Victoria, there was an instant demand for Ukrainian and Russian language resources. Schools will not have language resources to support students with language backgrounds that have not existed in great numbers (or at all) in the school previously.

Provides students with access to texts in first language and is particularly useful for classroom teachers in early weeks/months of enrolment.

Bilingual books. Books with multicultural content. Bilingual books are so useful. There are 25 different, shifting languages at our school. We are slowly building a resource for our Library but they're expensive! It's so hard to justify the expense when there's only one family. LMERC fills this need beautifully. I also use LMERC to test books with multicultural and diverse content. I've bought a few for our library after using them at LMERC.

...only 3% of all books published were by First Nations authors, and only 7% were published by writers who identified as people of colour.

Our diverse population

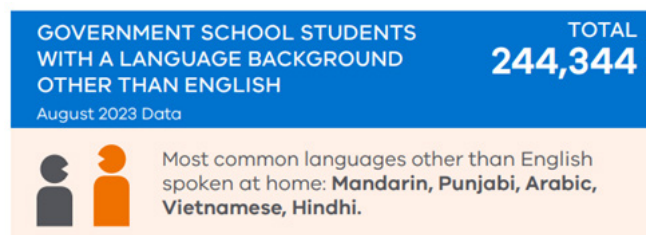
A snapshot of census data from 2021 showed the cultural diversity within the state of Victoria.

According to the 2021 Census¹:



[Census | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://abs.gov.au)

Victorian government school data from 2023 shows more than 244,000 students have a language background other than English (LBOTE).



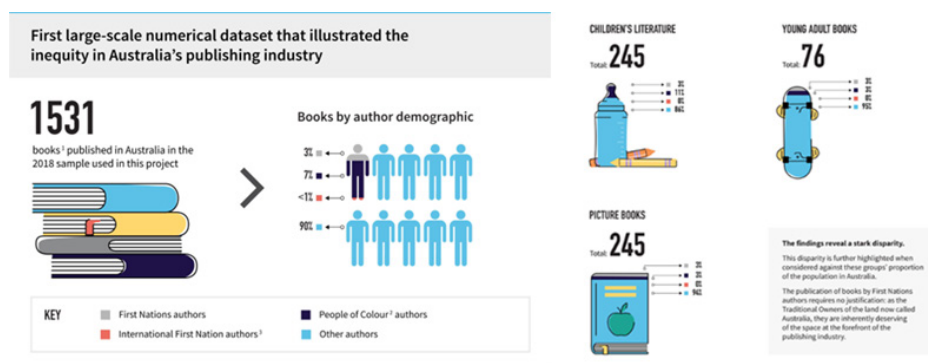
[summarystatssnapshot.pdf \(education.vic.gov.au\)](https://education.vic.gov.au/summarystatssnapshot.pdf)

Dr Helen Adam provides the following perspective:

One of the greatest challenges facing 21st-century educators in Australia is that of the diverse nature of our classrooms. Very often the children considered to be at greatest risk of poor academic outcomes are those from marginalised and minoritised backgrounds. These same children are often those whose own lives, backgrounds and communities are invisible in the resources used in our schools. (Adam, 2021)

Recognising that the need for diverse resources exists, the next consideration is how widely are they available for schools to access.

[Research](#) undertaken at Victoria University studied the positioning and representation of 'diverse' authors in contemporary Australian literature. The First Nations and People of Colour Writer Count (FNPOC), a quantitative analysis of the books published by Australian authors in 2018 sought to identify the publication rate of books in 2018 that were by Australian authors who had identified as First Nations and as writers of colour. The survey which included picture books, children's books, young adult books, poetry books, non-fiction and fiction found only 3% of all books published were by First Nations authors, and only 7% were published by writers who identified as people of colour.



The [Centre for Literacy in Primary Education \(CLPE\)](#) in the UK has been conducting yearly surveys since 2017 to provide insights into the extent and quality of ethnic representation in children's literature published in the UK. This research, known as [Reflecting Realities](#) found there has been a 26% rise in the volume of inclusive and representative literature in that time.

It is reasonable to expect there has been improvement in representation in books published in Australia since the Victoria University survey. What the results from the above surveys do tell us is that to ensure our diverse school communities are visible in the stories we share and the resources we use, we need to be intentional in our selection practices. While LMERC provides a place for schools to access those resources, seek advice on purchasing resources and selection criteria, all schools should be looking to include diverse and contemporary resources in their collections.

Archive

LMERC also has a research archive that contains historical publications in the areas of EAL, Languages and multicultural education. Many of the archival Department of Education publications from the 1970s to 1990s are available as digital copies through the catalogue.



The archive also contains a historical collection of Australian young adult and children's literature with culturally diverse themes and characters. While not definitive, it reflects the changing nature of Australian society and school populations in children's literature. The Archive collection is open to educators and researchers but is not available for loan.

References

Adam, H. (2021). *Transforming practice: Transforming lives through diverse children's literature*. Primary English Teaching Association Australia.

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