DEAKIN UNIVERSITY | DEAKIN CENTRE FOR RESEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

Volume 3 / Number 3 / October 2026

'Teachers as Co-learners' of languages: Recurricularising language and literacy learning from a multilingual stance

Michiko Weinmann, Sarah Ohi, Andrew Skourdoumbis, Jack K. Bennett, Thu Ha Bui

THE PROJECT

In 2024, the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS) in collaboration with Deakin University undertook a pilot study, 'Teachers as Co-learners' of languages: Recurricularising language and literacy learning from a multilingual stance.

The Teachers as Co-learners (TCL) program, developed by MACS, is a highly innovative approach to Languages education within the Australian primary education context that engages all teachers and students as learners and users of the school's additional language. The TCL program is centred on close collaboration between classroom teachers and the school's language assistant as co-facilitators of the school's language program. The TCL approach is supported by a comprehensive suite of specific curriculum and assessment materials developed by MACS in consultation with TCL teachers. A key focus of the TCL approach is the daily allocation of 15 minutes in each classroom as a proactive means of enabling frequent and consistent additional language learning opportunities leveraging on the classroom teachers' pedagogical expertise and the language assistant's linguistic skills.

Since its inception in 2016, the TCL program has grown to include over 50 schools in the MACS network, delivering programs in a range of languages, including Italian, French, Indonesian, and Auslan. The program is also offered by select schools governed by the three other Victorian dioceses — Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst.

The research aimed to:

- Explore the experiences and perspectives of classroom teachers, language assistants, curriculum and school leaders with the TCL approach to language teaching and learning.
- Examine how working within TCL may have shifted participants' understanding of multilingualism, and their practice of language(s) and literacy education.
- Generate insights regarding participants' views on their own and their students' (additional) language learning, their developing identity as multilingual speakers, their collaborative cross-curricular practice, and their needs and aspirations for a sustainable whole-school approach to Languages education in primary contexts.

KEY FINDINGS

Focus group conversations were conducted with four MACS primary schools. All participant schools introduced the TCL approach in either 2019 or 2020 and had several years of experience with the adoption of TCL.

All four participant schools found the TCL program to be valuable and beneficial, with two schools reporting that TCL had been highly positive and two participant school emphasising the innovation of TCL, which provides both opportunities and challenges.

Participants' overall experience with TCL highlighted the following aspects:

- learning together encourages linguistic 'risk-taking' by both students and teachers
- students are quick to develop confidence and fluency in the language
- students and teachers develop improved language awareness by making connections between languages
- cross-curricular collaboration between classroom teachers, language assistants, and specialist teachers of Languages.

The data indicates that TCL:

- contributes to developing and supporting confident (language) learners
- contributes to engaging students in an authentic language learning environment, setting them up for academic success
- levels the playing field as all students commence as beginner learners of the target language
- facilitates and supports equitable encounters with and of linguistic and cultural diversity as curriculum-as-lived, within the school and the broader community
- supports teachers' spontaneity and improvisation in the classroom as a crucial part of contemporary teaching practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Key considerations for effective TCL adoption include:

- whole-school 'buy-in'
- teacher confidence
- consistent scheduling and integration in the school day
- access to program-specific curriculum and assessment resources
- collaboration between classroom teachers and language assistants
- student-led elements, e.g. students model the target language, run language sessions, and lead language learning activities.

> "It's about building student confidence and teacher confidence so that Italian speaking, it's not just in that 15 minutes, we hear it throughout the school at different times."
>
> — Teacher

NEXT STEPS

The TCL program has much to contribute to the national project of realising 'a new literacy compact in Australia', given current calls to reconceptualise languages and literacies teaching and learning so that it is representative and inclusive of Australia's diverse student population (Lo Bianco, 2022).

FUNDING

REDI small grant

PARTNERS

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)

REFERENCES

Lo Bianco J. (2022) Reconceptualizing literacy for a new Australia. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 45, 281–296. (https://doi.org/10.1007/s44020-022-00024-0)

Weinmann M., Ohi S., Skourdoumbis A., Bennett J. K., Bui T. H. (2025) '*Teachers as Co-learners' of languages: Recurricularising language and literacy learning from a multilingual stance.* Research report, Deakin University..

Weinmann M., Ohi S., Bui T. H., Bennett J. K., Skourdoumbis A. (2026). 'Teachers as Co-learners' of languages: Recurricularising language and literacy learning as a multilingual and collaborative endeavour. In: Turner M. & Green B. (Eds), *Multilingualism as Opportunity: An Integrated Perspective on English and Languages Education in Australia*. (pp. 147–166). Routledge.

DEAKIN UNIVERSITY | DEAKIN CENTRE FOR RESEARCH FOR EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

redi@deakin.edu.au
(+61) 3 9246 8185