Chapter 7
English as an Additional Language Learners

Chapter Summary

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English as an Additional Language (EAL) Learners

English as an additional language (EAL) learners are those students who first learned to speak, read, and/or write a language other than English. EAL students may have recently immigrated to Canada or they may have been born in Canada and been living in homes in which the primary spoken language is not English.

Linguistic and cultural diversity is characteristic of schools and communities throughout the province. Children and their families immigrate to Manitoba from every corner of the world. Canadian students of Aboriginal, Francophone, and other cultural descents, whose families have lived in Manitoba for many generations, may also be learning to speak English as an additional language.

Canadian-Born EAL Students

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) peoples	• may speak English, French, an FNMI language, or a combination of languages in their homes and communities • can differ greatly from community to community • have skill in their first language, which influences further language learning, that ranges from fluent to minimal • may use culturally specific nonverbal communication and may have specific cultural values and beliefs regarding listening and speaking
Francophone people	• come from within the province and from other areas of Canada • may enter English-speaking schools at any age or may be learning English as an additional language in a Francophone school
Hutterites, Mennonites, or people of other religious groups	• attend school within their communities and learn English to access the outcomes of the program of studies • have religious and cultural concerns in their communities that strongly influence the selection of instructional strategies and teaching materials
Canadian-born children of immigrants	• have parents who may not speak English, limiting family support in schooling • in some cases, are born in Canada and return to their parents' home country, only to return for schooling in Manitoba at some later time

Foreign-Born EAL Students

Recently arrived immigrants	• make up a large group of EAL students in Manitoba schools • may arrive at any time in the school year, and could be at any grade level • usually have attended school on a regular basis in their home country, and may have already studied English at school there, although this typically involves only a basic introduction to the language
Refugees	• have all the needs of regular immigrants, as well as issues relating to war, disaster, trauma, and disorientation • may not have wanted to leave their home countries • may be worried about family members who have been left behind • may have received little or no formal schooling and have complex needs that go beyond learning English as an additional language • may qualify for additional assistance from the federal government on arrival • may require assistance from government, social, and community agencies for several years

Challenges for EAL Students

• Students may struggle with expressing their knowledge, gathering information, and pursuing new concepts in an unfamiliar language.

• Students are in an environment where they are expected to acquire more sophisticated and complex knowledge and understanding of the world around them.

• Students often learn the full Manitoba curriculum while learning English.

• Many students will experience differences between their home language and culture and the English language and culture in which they are immersed.

Cultural Considerations

Each EAL student's cultural and life experiences will differ from those of other EAL students and those of their classmates. In preparing to welcome new students to the school, staff and teachers should find out as much as possible about the students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Many countries have a complex linguistic environment. For example, students from India may use two or three languages regularly.

In some cases, language is the basis for political strife between groups of people. For example, using the language of government or industry gives people exclusive access to power in some multilingual countries. In such cases, languages can be a highly emotional issue.

Teachers should not assume that because two students come from the same general geographical area they have language and culture in common. They may have very different backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs.

Sensitivity to political issues is also important. People who have been on opposing sides of political disputes in the past may now be living side-by-side in Canada. Usually, they leave their political differences behind them, but in some cases long-standing conflicts between groups of people can affect the way they regard and interact with one another.

Teachers should avoid stereotypical thinking about a student's background, abilities, and preferences. Every country, culture, and language group also has diversity within it. It is important to learn from students and their families about their previous experiences, goals, expectations, and abilities. This inquiry and listening should be done with an open mind.

The Role of Culture in Additional Language Learning

Learning an additional language often involves learning a new culture. By the time a child is five years old, the first culture is already deeply rooted. The first culture of EAL students influences their way of communicating in the second language. For example, many Asian and FNMI students may avoid direct eye contact when speaking with teachers out of respect, based on the teachings of their cultures.

Gestures and body movements convey different meanings in different cultures. Also, the physical distance between speaker and listener is an important factor in some cultures. Some students may stand very close when they speak to a teacher, whereas others may back off if they think the teacher is too close. As the significance of even a friendly or encouraging touch is open to different cultural interpretations, it should be used cautiously, if not avoided altogether.

Learning how to interpret body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and volume in a new language and culture takes time on the part of the learner and patience and understanding on the part of the teacher. It may take a while before students learn the cultural cues that help them communicate more effectively and appropriately in non-verbal ways.

Some EAL students may only feel comfortable with male or with female teachers, depending on their customs and experiences. EAL students may or may not have previously studied in a classroom or school with both male and female students. Prior knowledge of this and discussion with the parents or guardians and the student will help EAL students feel more comfortable in the school setting.

Impact on Learning Preferences

Like all students, EAL students have differing personalities, cognitive abilities, and educational and life experiences that influence their abilities and approaches to learning.

Some students take a systematic or analytical approach to additional language learning. They want to know more about how the language works, such as rules governing grammar and spelling. These students may need longer conversational silences, as they wait to make sure that when they speak they will use language that is grammatically correct. These students tend to be shy or rigidly independent and have difficulty making mistakes or accepting or asking for assistance.

Other students are holistic in their orientation, focusing more on getting their message across than on its delivery. These students tend to be outgoing risk-takers who try to communicate from the start. They are typically comfortable with making mistakes, being corrected, and asking for assistance; however, they may be satisfied with lower literacy levels and need to be motivated to work hard at developing greater accuracy in their language use.

Other Learning Impacts

Class discussion and participation may be foreign concepts to students of other cultures; for them, volunteering answers and information may be a bold and immodest practice. EAL students may be shocked by the spontaneous and outspoken behaviours of their peers. They have to adjust to new teaching styles and turn-taking rules in the classroom. Students who have come from schools with populations far greater than those found in Manitoba may have learned to disappear in a large group but now feel as if their every move stands out. It may take these students some time to become comfortable in this new learning environment.

EAL students may have to make a transition from rote memorization of facts to analytical problem solving or from total dependence to self-reliance. Discovery, trial and error, and a question-answer style of learning can be strange to students who have been taught to believe that the teacher is the sole source of information and that the learner must accept information and not question it or volunteer opinions. Experience-based instruction with field trips may not be taken seriously by students and parents or guardians who have different views of learning. Many parents or guardians of EAL students also expect their children to do a great deal of homework. Communication between the home and school is essential to ensure mutual understanding of expectations.

Understanding Cultural Differences in Student Behaviour

Teachers working with EAL students should also be aware that these students may sometimes respond in unexpected ways to particular classroom situations or events, due to different experiences, cultural values, and beliefs from those of other students. The following chart identifies possible cultural explanations for behaviours and attitudes that EAL students may exhibit.

Behaviour or Attitude	Possible Cultural Explanation
The student avoids eye contact.	Keeping eyes downcast may be a way of showing respect. In some cultures, direct eye contact with a teacher is considered disrespectful and a challenge to the teacher's authority.
The student tends to smile when disagreeing with what is being said or when being reprimanded.	A smile may be a gesture of respect that children are taught in order to avoid being offensive in difficult situations.
The student shrinks from, or responds poorly to, apparently inoffensive forms of physical contact or proximity.	There may be taboos on certain types of physical contact. Buddhists, for instance, regard the head and shoulders as sacred and would consider it impolite to ruffle a child's hair or give a reassuring pat on the shoulder. There are also significant differences among cultures with respect to people's sense of what is considered an appropriate amount of personal space.
The student refuses to eat with peers.	Some students may be unaccustomed to eating with anyone but members of their own family.
The student does not participate actively in group work or collaborate readily with peers on cooperative assignments.	In some cultures, cooperative group work is never used by teachers. Students may thus view sharing as "giving away knowledge" and may see no distinction between legitimate collaboration and cheating.
The student displays uneasiness, expresses disapproval or even misbehaves in informal learning situations or situations involving open-ended learning processes (e.g., exploration).	Schooling in some cultures involves a strict formality. For students who are used to this, an informal classroom atmosphere may seem chaotic and undemanding, and teachers with an informal approach may seem unprofessional. Such students may also be uncomfortable with process-oriented learning activities and prefer activities that yield more tangible and evident results.

Behaviour or Attitude	Possible Cultural Explanation
The student refuses to participate in extracurricular activities or in various physical education activities (e.g., swimming, skating, track and field).	Extracurricular activities, along with some physical education activities, may not be considered a part of learning or may even be contrary to a student's religion or cultural outlook. Some students may also be working during after-school hours.
The student seems inattentive and does not display active learning behaviours.	In some cultures, the learning process involves observing and doing, or imitating, rather than listening and absorbing (e.g., through note-taking).
Performance following instructions reveals that the student is not understanding the instructions, even though she or he exhibited active listening behaviours that suggested understanding and refrained from asking for help or further explanation.	In some cultures, expressing a lack of understanding or asking for help from the teacher is interpreted as a suggestion that the teacher has not been doing a good job and is considered impolite.
The student is unresponsive, uncooperative, or even disrespectful in dealing with teachers of the opposite gender.	Separate schooling for boys and girls is the norm in some cultures. Likewise, in some cultures the expectations for males and females are quite different. The idea that females and males should have the same opportunities for schooling and play comparable roles as educators may run contrary to some students' cultural experiences.
The student appears reluctant to engage in debate, speculation, argument, or other processes that involve directly challenging the views and ideas of others.	In some cultures, it is considered inappropriate to openly challenge another's point of view, especially the teacher's. In some cases, there may be a value attached to being prepared, knowledgeable, and correct when opening one's mouth.
The student exhibits discomfort or embarrassment at being singled out for special attention or praise.	To put oneself in the limelight for individual praise is not considered appropriate in some cultures in which the group is considered more important than the individual.
The student fails to observe the conventions of silent reading.	Some students may be culturally predisposed to see reading as essentially an oral activity and will read aloud automatically. For others, reading aloud is associated with memorization.

The sample situations described in the preceding chart indicate the need for teachers to be aware of their assumptions about the meaning of a student's behaviour and to adjust their own responses accordingly. Often the most effective response of teachers is to be clear and explicit about their own expectations or those prevalent in Canadian society.

As EAL students become part of the mainstream class, everyone in the class must be prepared to adapt and broaden their understanding. There are times when the adjustments made to address the needs of EAL students will affect and make demands of the other students in the class.

Feedback on Pronunciation

The EAL student can be a fluent speaker, but sometimes communication breaks down because the student has problems mastering the English sound system. The amount of difficulty or phonetic interference will depend to a large extent on the pronunciation patterns of the child's first language. For example, a student who speaks a first language that has few final consonants will tend to drop word-final consonants in English or other languages, resulting in utterances like the following:

Jaw an Baw wa to da sto. (John and Bob walked to the store.)

Many EAL students are unnecessarily referred to speech-language pathologists because of problems that are directly attributable to first language interference. It is important for teachers to be aware that it takes students time to actually learn to hear new sounds, pronounce them properly, and use them in conversation and in learning to spell. However, if a student stutters or stammers, or has prolonged problems with pronouncing certain sounds, it may be necessary to find out if these problems are also evident in the student's first language.

To find out whether or not the student requires speech-language intervention, listen to the student speaking in his or her first language with a peer, ask the student's parents or guardians, or request an assessment in the student's first language.

Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

It is important for classroom teachers to understand the difference between functional, everyday language skills, and the language skills required in an academic setting. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) typically develop within two years of arrival in an integrated classroom setting. BICS make students appear to have mastered many aspects of the language, as they are able to discuss, joke, and socialize with classmates; however, there are considerable differences between BICS and the language required for academic purposes. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) takes five to eight years to acquire, and EAL learners need support and assistance with their language learning to achieve CALP. Therefore, it is important to remember that EAL learners may or may not have sufficient language or concepts on which to base their new language learning.

Implications of Learning Multiple Languages Concurrently

The number of trilingual students in Canada is increasing, and most people are aware of the advantages of speaking three languages. Possessing skills in multiple languages leads to educational, economic, and sociocultural benefits. Students for whom English is a second language, including those who are learning two languages as well as those who already have bilingual competencies in languages other than English, develop certain tendencies as trilingual speakers that may aid their language development. Limited instruction in a third language will not lead to trilingual proficiency, but it will enable these students to develop language learning skills.

Since the majority of trilinguals are bilinguals learning a third language, success in third language acquisition is based on proficiency in the first language, how recent the second language was acquired, linguistic distance, and interlanguage transfer. EAL students may find it beneficial to learn a third language as it may improve their understanding of English.

Additional Language Acquisition

The term *additional language* refers to a language that is learned after the first language is relatively well established. By the age of five, children have control over most of their first language grammar. Any language they learn after that is filtered through their previously learned language.

EAL learners are already learning a second language—typically English—in Manitoba schools. Whatever their backgrounds, all EAL learners will benefit from being included in the German language arts program. In fact, the EAL learner's own first language may provide an advantage. Also, the skills necessary to learn a new language are transferable to learning other languages. EAL students should be encouraged to be included in German language arts programs, despite their limited proficiency in English.

Tips for Teachers of EAL Students

1. **Be conscious of the vocabulary you use.**
   Choose simple, straightforward words that are in everyday use.

2. **Provide additional wait time when students are responding to questions.**

3. **Simplify sentence structures and repeat sentences verbatim before trying to rephrase.**
   Short, affirmative sentences are easiest for new learners of English to understand. Complex sentences and passive verb constructions pose a greater challenge. For example, instead of "The homework must be completed and handed in by Friday," it would be better to say "You must finish the work and give it to me on Friday."

4. **Recycle new words.**
   Reintroduce new words in a different context or use recently learned words to introduce or expand a concept.

5. **Rephrase idioms or teach their meanings.**
   EAL students often translate idiomatic expressions literally. Post a list of idioms for students to see, talk about and use.

6. **Clearly mark transitions during classroom activities.**
   To avoid confusion when changing topics or focus, explicitly signal the changes (e.g., "first we will…", "now it's time for…").

7. **Give clear instructions.**
   Number and label the steps in an activity. Reinforce oral instructions for homework and projects with a written outline to help students who may not be able to process oral instruction quickly enough to understand fully.

8. **Use many non-verbal cues.**
   Gestures, facial expressions and mime will help learners grasp the meaning of what you are saying. Be aware, however, that some gestures (e.g., pointing at people) may have negative meanings in some cultures).

9. **Periodically check to ensure EAL students understand.**
   EAL students may be reluctant to ask for clarification or to admit that they don't understand something, if asked directly. To check for understanding, focus on the students' body language, watching for active listening behaviours or for expressions or postures that indicate confusion or frustration.

10. **Write key words on the board, and use visual and other non-verbal cues, wherever possible, to present key ideas.**
    Concrete objects, charts, maps, pictures, photos, gestures, facial expressions, and so on form an important complement to oral explanations for EAL students.

11. **Provide written notes, summaries, and instructions.**

12. **Use the students' native languages to check comprehension and to clarify problems.**
    If you or some of your students speak the native language of your EAL student, use the first language to clarify instructions, provide translations of key words that are difficult to explain, and find out what the student knows but cannot express in English. Most EAL students will only need this additional support for a limited time or in rare situations.

Tips for Teachers of EAL Students: Some tips adapted, with permission from the Province of British Columbia, from *English as a Second Language Learners: A Guide for Classroom Teachers*, pp. 18, 19, 20. ©1999 Province of British Columbia. All rights reserved.

Communicate interest in students' linguistic development, and set expectations.

13. Respond to students' language errors.
When students produce incorrect grammar or pronunciation, rephrase their responses to model correct usage without drawing specific attention to the error. In responding to students' written errors, try to focus on consistent errors of a specific type and concentrate on modelling or correcting only that error. If you target each and every error, the student may not grasp the specific rules that must be applied and may become confused and overwhelmed. Keep in mind that it is best to focus on content and understanding first.

Considering the Student's Perspective

As well as creating an effective learning environment for EAL students, it is important for teachers to consider the learning environment from the student's perspective.

EAL students learn best when they:
- are involved in decision making
- become aware of available resources
- are actively involved in evaluation practices
- have opportunities to develop a sense of self-confidence and competence
- feel safe and secure to try things and to make mistakes
- are free to interact with materials, peers, and adults
- have opportunities to make choices and decisions about what to do, what to use, and who to work with
- become aware of the needs of others and show respect and a caring attitude toward others
- have opportunities for success
- influence their own experiences and the experiences of all others in the class
- continue to develop theories about the way the world works
- are both a learner and a teacher, an individual and a group member.

Celebrating Cultural Differences

There are many ways to celebrate cultural differences in the classroom and the school.

Tips for Celebrating Cultural Differences

1. Begin by finding out as much as possible about the cultures represented in your room and in your community.

2. Ensure that the school is culturally inclusive visually. Displays around the school should represent various backgrounds, cultures, religions, and lifestyles. Emphasize the everyday rather than the exotic.

3. Bilingual as well as first language books and dictionaries, and books written by a wide variety of authors from various cultures, can be part of the school library collection. The school library should be reviewed regularly to ensure that materials are culturally appropriate.

4. Seasonal, holiday, and artistic displays in the classroom and school should reflect the cultural composition of the school. If cultural and faith celebrations are honoured within the school, they should be inclusive of all members of the school community.

5. School staff members should be encouraged to decorate their work spaces with items that reflect their cultural backgrounds.

Differentiating Learning Activities for EAL Students

It may be necessary to differentiate learning activities for EAL students. Some examples of differentiation for EAL students are listed in the chart below.

	General Curriculum Focus	**Whole Group Activity**	**Suggestions for Differentiation**
Grade 1	Develop reading skills in German.	Class reads grade-level story and discusses.	EAL learner will highlight words understood. EAL learner will sit with a buddy and follow the text.
Grade 2	Exchange basic personal information.	Using a vocabulary list, students work in groups of two or three to write a short script about meeting a new friend. They read the script together.	EAL learner will contribute some of the words for the script. He or she may mime parts of the script with the class.
Grade 3	Explore the use of language for imagination, humour, and fun.	Students play a variety of traditional sports or games in German.	EAL learner may display prior knowledge of a game and teach the game to classmates.

Choosing Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategies that are effective in teaching second languages are often the same strategies that are effective with EAL students. In general, structured cooperative learning activities, group discussions, and the use of educational technology are effective instructional strategies for EAL students.

Cooperative Learning

➜ **For more information…**

Chapter 4

Cooperative learning activities that incorporate predictable routines and structures are integral to a supportive learning environment. Cooperative learning includes students working together in small groups toward a group goal or task completion, students sharing ideas and materials, and students celebrating success based on the performance of the group rather than on the performance of individuals.

The benefits of using cooperative learning with EAL students are that it allows them to interact with their peers, it models language and social interactions, it develops positive interdependence and self-confidence, and it allows for repetition of information as the group works together to solve problems. The challenges of using cooperative learning are that EAL students may find it to be a threatening experience, may not be used to expressing personal opinions, and/or may not have enough language to interact with their peers.

When using cooperative learning as an instructional strategy, teachers should remember to keep groups small, group EAL learners carefully, assign roles in each group, and monitor group interactions.

Group Discussion

Similar to cooperative learning, group discussions allow EAL learners to articulate their views and respond to the opinions of others. Group discussions are essential for building background knowledge on specific issues, creating motivation and interest, and exploring new ideas. They also create a sense of belonging and lead to social interactions.

The challenges of group discussion for EAL students include insufficient listening comprehension skills, misinterpretation of body language, and the expression of one's personal opinion, which may not have been encouraged in the EAL student's previous educational setting.

To foster effective group discussions, encourage an atmosphere of openness and acceptance, establish ground rules for discussions, choose topics for discussion carefully, and give EAL students an opportunity to think before they respond.

Technology

All students, including EAL students, should become familiar with different types of technology. Some students may have had extensive opportunities to use different technologies, while others may have had limited opportunities. In most cases, students are highly motivated to use any form of technology.

Some suggested forms of technology are:

- electronic journals or diaries
- interactive projects with different schools or countries
- chat rooms, news groups, and bulletin boards
- production of audio, video, or multimedia assignments
- structured email interactions
- submission of assignments via email
- cross-cultural communication with e-pals
- writing conferences via email

Using technology benefits students by presenting information in a new way, providing oral presentation of written text (in some cases), and allowing students to work independently at their own pace. Interacting using technology may also be less threatening and intimidating for EAL learners than interacting in person.

The challenges of using technology include providing instruction on how to use the technologies and monitoring the activity to ensure that students are on task. Assigning partners in the computer lab is a common and valuable strategy. There are many effective educational software programs available for teaching basic computer skills, keyboarding, and even second languages.

Suggestions for Assessment

→ **For more information…**

Chapter 8

Appendix E: Assessment Blackline Masters

With EAL students, assessment includes finding out about their background knowledge and about any gaps in their prior education.

Accurate assessment of EAL students is difficult because of the limited ability of these students to express themselves. Some modification of assessment practices may be necessary.

Reporting EAL Students' Progress

School jurisdictions may have specific policies regarding the reporting of achievement of EAL students. Some jurisdictions will supply specifically designed EAL report cards. Other jurisdictions will modify the regular report card to reflect the program of the EAL student. Still other jurisdictions have developed report cards to reflect the needs of all students and have the capacity to include learning outcomes developed specifically for EAL students. No matter what format is used, it is important that accurate information is shared.

Whenever necessary, the services of an interpreter can be used to explain to parents how their children are doing. Teachers can check with local service agencies for lists of available interpreters or ask the family if they have someone they trust to interpret the information for them.