



Australian Government  
Department of Immigration  
and Citizenship

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# Language training and settlement success: Are they related?

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## Research Report

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- Chapter 2 draws, in particular, on work by Laura Ficorilli, Sun Hee Ok Kim, Loy Lising, Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn and Alan Williams
- Chapter 3 is based on work by Loy Lising and Agnes Terraschke
- Chapter 4 draws on work by Laura Ficorilli, Sun Hee Ok Kim, Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn and Alan Williams
- Pamela McPherson, Charlotte Setijadi-Dunn, Kerry Taylor-Leech and Alan Williams worked on the analyses for Chapter 5.

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# Abbreviations

AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
AMEP RC	Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre
AMES	Adult Migrant English Service
ASCO	Australian Standard Classification of Occupations
C01 – C12	Centre 01 – Centre 12
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
CV	curriculum vitae
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
Int	Interpreter
L1	first language
LLNP	Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program
LO	Learning Outcome
Q1 – Q4	Quarter 1 – Quarter 4
TAFE	Technical and Further Education



# Chapter 1

## Introduction



# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Aims, rationale and report outline

The aim of this study is to explore the interactions that newly arrived migrants to Australia have in English in the community and in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in order to better understand their language needs in early settlement. This report addresses three key questions.

- 1 What kinds of interactions in English (spoken, written and computer mediated) do contemporary AMEP clients engage in inside and outside the classroom during their time in the AMEP and afterwards?
- 2 How are the two related and how can their fit be improved?
- 3 How are interactions in English different for different learner groups and how can language training be customised to meet the language needs of different client groups?

Regardless of their age or level of education, it is crucial that migrants have proficiency in English if they are to fully capitalise on the other skills they bring to Australia (Chiswick & Miller 2001). Research indicates that investments in language learning are more useful immediately on arrival rather than later, so that the earliest years are the most crucial for language gain (Fennelly and Palasz 2003). It is therefore crucial to have a nuanced understanding of how migrants engage with English in the community and how their experiences in the AMEP contribute to this engagement. Unlike first-language learners, second-language learners differ widely in their language acquisition. Learner characteristics, including previous exposure to the language, previous education, and age and contextual factors, can influence the rate of progress and outcome. Among these, the quality and the quantity of the interactions in the target language are crucial. This study was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the communication and interaction patterns of new arrivals in order to optimise language instruction during this critical early phase of settlement.

In this chapter the research approach and the methodology used in this study are outlined before an overview of the data collected and the study participants is given. The results of the analysis are presented in the following chapters. Chapter 2 considers the participants' goals and the pathways they took towards these, while in Chapter 3 the situations in which they engaged with English in the different areas of their lives are explored. Chapter 4 discusses the participants' experiences in the AMEP and the relationship between these and their English-language needs. Chapter 5 explores some of the issues participants faced in developing speaking and literacy skills. Chapter 6 draws together the major findings and considers their implications for the AMEP.

### 1.2 Study design, data collection and data analysis

This study was designed as a longitudinal multi-site, participant ethnography so that issues related to language learning and use could be explored qualitatively in context.

Ethnography is a problem-based qualitative research approach in which data that illuminate a research problem are systematically collected in context in order to address the research questions. A key assumption of this approach is that social phenomena such as language learning need to be explored in context and that the researcher needs to become a participant observer in order to understand that context. The aim therefore is to provide a description of a particular group rather than to test hypotheses (Richards 2003). We therefore sought participants while they were studying in the AMEP and followed them for one year as they studied, worked and interacted in the community. The result of this process is rich data about the participants and their context, which can be explored to illuminate a range of phenomena.

The AMEP Research Centre had unique access to migrants studying in the AMEP through collaboration with providers. As shown in Table 1.1, eleven AMEP centres in six states agreed to participate (four in New South Wales, two each in Victoria and Western Australia, and one each in Tasmania, South Australia and Queensland) (see Appendix 1 for a description of each centre).

**Table 1.1: Participating centres and total number of participants**

Centre no.	State	Participating AMEP centre	CSWE level class	No. of participants starting
C01	NSW	Parramatta	CSWE II	12
C02	NSW	Blacktown	CSWE III	17
C03	NSW	Bankstown	CSWE I	16
C05*	NSW	Randwick	CSWE III	12
C06	QLD	Southbank	CSWE III	20
C07	SA	Adelaide	Pre-CSWE; CSWE I	16
C08	VIC	Melbourne	CSWE I	15
C09	VIC	Flagstaff	CSWE III	11
C10	TAS	Hobart	CSWE III	13
C11	WA	Perth	Pre-CSWE	10
C12	WA	Perth	CSWE II	10
<b>Total</b>				<b>152</b>

\* Centre 04 was dropped from the study before the start of data collection for logistical reasons.

Each centre provided a teacher-researcher to collaborate with an academic researcher affiliated with the AMEP Research Centre to organise and conduct data collection. Parallel sets of data were collected in each of the centres over an 11-12 month period between May 2008 and June 2009. The exact timing of this period and of visits to the centres by academic researchers varied according to circumstances in individual centres.

Across all sites, the following data were collected.

- **Centre observations and materials**

These gave insight into the character of the centre and consisted of field notes, photographs and materials such as brochures given to students during orientation and sent out to prospective clients.

- **Participant profiles**

These included a demographic profile and gave an overall picture of each participant. They were built up over time from a number of sources, including interviews, centre data and observation.

- **Quarterly interviews**

These were conducted at a time and place convenient to the participant. Initially, many were conducted at the AMEP centres where the participants studied, but as they moved out into the community, they were also conducted in participants' homes, coffee shops or other locations. Researchers made every effort to ensure that the participants felt as comfortable with them as possible in order to build up rapport, and in many cases additional social appointments such as informal barbecues and telephone calls were arranged. While the aim was to record four interviews over the year, some participants left the study for various reasons, or left for a period and then returned (if they were travelling overseas, for example), and so this was not possible in all cases. Interpreters were used with participants whose spoken skills were insufficient to understand or respond in English.

- **AMEP classroom observations**

The academic or teacher-researcher observed classes that included participants. They noted details of the lessons and how learners participated, and collected the relevant teaching materials. In some cases activities were recorded.

- **Sets of teaching materials used with the class**

These included teaching plans and materials that had been covered in preparation for assessment.

- **Participant assessment samples**  
These were samples of assessment tasks in speaking, listening, reading and writing and the participants' performance on these, including recordings.
- **Recordings and/or observations (where recording was not feasible) of participant interaction in English outside class but within AMEP centre**  
These included informal talk among participants and other clients during the break time and provided samples of informal talk in a familiar setting. In some cases they were recorded by one of the researchers, and in others the participants recorded themselves and secured the relevant permissions from their interlocutors.
- **Recordings of participants in interaction in English with friends/family outside the classroom**  
In some cases recordings were made by researchers when participants were with family and friends, and in others the participants themselves made the recordings and secured the relevant permissions.
- **Recordings and/or observations (where recording was not feasible) of participants in transactional interactions in non-AMEP setting**  
These included interactions in the community, at work and in further study. In some cases they were recorded by researchers when participants were with family and friends, and in others the participants themselves did the recording and secured the relevant permissions.

The data collected in this way over the 2008-09 data collection period are summarised in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: Data collected over the period of the project**

<b>Data type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Centre observations and materials	51
Participant profiles	152
Quarterly interviews – Initial participant interviews	148
Quarterly interviews – 2nd interviews	117
Quarterly interviews – 3rd interviews	107
Quarterly interviews – 4th interviews	108
AMEP classroom observations	97
Sets of teaching materials used with the class	134
Participant assessment samples	400
Recordings/observations of participant interaction in English outside class but within AMEP centre	70
Recordings of participants in interaction in English with friends/family <b>outside the classroom</b>	125
Recordings/observations of participants in transactional interactions in non-AMEP setting	191

The data were uploaded to a website database specially developed to accommodate the large amount collected and to allow access across Australia. Printed materials and pictures were uploaded directly or scanned and converted into PDF files. Recordings were transcribed and proofread by the researchers before the final versions were uploaded.

The data were analysed by the team of academic researchers using Microsoft Office applications and NVivo<sup>1</sup> software. The data were coded in NVivo for major categories relevant to the research questions (see Appendix 3), and the kinds of engagement in English in the community were analysed and related to data collected on participants' engagement in the AMEP. A more detailed analysis was conducted on these categories in order to establish patterns across participants from different backgrounds. For example, interview data on where participants said they used English were related to factors such as age and first language in order to see if different patterns emerged. The results of these analyses are presented in the following chapters. In the next section, the characteristics of the study participants are described.

### 1.3 Participants

The study design was ethnographic and so the sample of participants was not intended to be strictly representative. However, in order to address issues related to the potential impact of gender, age, Certificate in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) level, educational background, source region and visa category, we needed to ensure that participants included migrants from the following groups:

- gender: both females and males
- age groups: 16–24 years, 25–34 years and 35+ (refined into three sub-groups of 35–44 years, 45–54 years, 55+ years)
- CSWE level: pre-CSWE, CSWE I, CSWE II and CSWE III
- educational level: <3 years, 4–7 years, 8–12 years, 13+ years
- source region: Africa, Asia, Middle East
- visa category: humanitarian, family reunion, economic.

Participants were volunteers selected on the basis of the AMEP class that they were attending at the start of the project, and this was usually, but not always, a class that was being taught by the teacher–researchers provided by centres. The advantage of this arrangement was that the research team could capitalise on the trust that had been built up between the participants and their teacher. This helped to establish a relaxed and comfortable rapport with participants, which is especially important in research with migrants who can feel quite vulnerable and unsure in the early stages of settlement. This relationship enabled researchers to maintain a close connection with participants, and to maintain contact even if participants returned overseas for fairly lengthy periods. As a result, the project enjoyed an exceptionally high participant retention rate throughout the data collection period. It also provided access to classes and insight into daily classroom routines, at least in the first term. A limitation of this arrangement, however, was that researchers could only select the level and type of class from those being taught by the teacher–researcher in the term in which data collection started.

Once a centre had expressed an interest in collaborating in the study and identified a suitable teacher–researcher to work with us, the centre suggested a class that would be convenient for researchers to follow. In this way, the following initial classes were identified:

- 1 x pre-CSWE
- 1 x pre-CSWE/CSWE I
- 2 x CSWE I
- 2 x CSWE II
- 5 x CSWE III.

The classes selected therefore included all the major levels of CSWE and both full-time and part-time modes of delivery, but there were larger numbers of participants at CSWE III level (73) than CSWE I (45), CSWE II (22) or pre-CSWE (12). This was because staff members with sufficient experience to undertake the role of teacher–researcher were often assigned the higher-level classes, and since in most cases participants were drawn from their classes, more higher level learners were included in the study. One advantage of this was that clients at this level often proved to be reflective contributors to the study.

Once the classes had been identified, the project was explained to learners, through translation where necessary, and volunteers were sought. Those who volunteered to participate were given a small token of appreciation (\$50 or a \$50 donation to a charity of their choice) six months into the data collection and at the end of data collection.

Table 1.3 shows the proficiency (CSWE) level, age, gender, and education level of the 152 participants who agreed to take part in the study in 2008.

**Table 1.3: CSWE level, gender, age and years of schooling of participants**

CSWE level (n = sample size)	Gender		Age					Years of schooling			
	M	F	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55+	<3	4–7	8–12	13+
<b>Pre-CSWE (n = 12)</b>	6	6	1	6	2	1	2	2	3	6	1
<b>CSWE I (n = 45)</b>	13	32	9	15	9	8	4	1	2	25	17
<b>CSWE II (n = 22)</b>	5	17	3	10	6	2	1	0	3	7	12
<b>CSWE III (n = 73)</b>	16	57	11	33	23	6	0	0	1	12	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>90</b>

As shown in Table 1.3, 112 of the initial participants were female and 40 were male. Thus 73.6% of our sample was female. This represents a slight exaggeration of the gender imbalance found nationally in the AMEP in 2008–09, in which 68% of clients were female (DIAC 2009: 205). In our study, females outnumbered males at most levels: 57 females to 16 males at CSWE III; 17 females to 5 males at CSWE II and 32 females to 13 males at CSWE I. There were equal numbers at pre-CSWE level. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 73 years. As shown in Table 1.3, 24 participants were in the 16–24 age bracket, 64 were in the 25–34 age group and 64 were from the 35+ age group. In the analyses, the 35+ age group was refined into three sub-groups: 35–44 years, 45–54 years and 55+ years. This meant that 84% of participants were under the age of 44, compared with 77.4% found among AMEP clients nationally (DIAC 2009: 205). The standard deviation for age indicates that there is quite a spread from the mean age.

The participants generally had relatively high levels of education. This relates to two factors: (a) that more classes at higher levels of English were included in the study and (b) that migrants with higher levels of education may feel more confident participating in a study of this kind and making a long-term commitment to research. While, in general, the reported number of years of schooling for participants in each CSWE level does not show a large variation, participants from CSWE III had the most schooling (13+ years). This is consistent with the findings of previous research (Kim 2009). The number of years of schooling reported by the participants is lowest for pre-CSWE and highest for CSWE III. Only three participants (one from Burma and two from Africa) had less than three years of schooling, and these participants were at pre-CSWE and CSWE I level.

Between them, the 152 participants had 53 different first languages. A list of these is given in Appendix 2 (languages are arranged according to largest number of speakers). The largest single country of origin was the People’s Republic of China, followed by Vietnam. Mandarin was the most common language background for the participants, followed by Arabic, Vietnamese, Korean and Thai. Table 1.4 compares the most common language backgrounds among study participants with those of AMEP clients in 2006. As shown in this table, the profile of language backgrounds in the sample is very similar to the profile currently found in the AMEP population. However, as discovered during the interviews, it was not always straightforward to determine language background precisely, as many participants spoke several languages, which they used for different purposes.

**Table 1.4: Most common language backgrounds**

First language	AMEP 2006* %	Project participants%
Mandarin	22.4	19.1
Arabic	20.0	11.8
Vietnamese	11.3	7.9
Cantonese	6.4	2.0
Dinka	5.1	1.3
Korean	5.0	5.3
Dari	4.5	0.7
Thai	4.2	4.6
Spanish	3.6	3.9
Russian	3.4	0.7

\* Figures are from DIAC 2008

Typically, for clients in the AMEP, the majority (67%) had entered Australia in the family migration stream, 18% had humanitarian visas and 14% were in the skilled migration stream. Tables 1.5 and 1.6 show the year in which they arrived in Australia and their marital status. From these, it can be seen that most were very recent arrivals (in 2008 or 2007) and were married.

**Table 1.5: Year of arrival in Australia**

Year of arrival	No. of participants	%
2008	63	41.4
2007	50	32.9
2006	22	14.5
2005	6	3.9
2004	7	4.6
Before 2004	4	2.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 1.6: Participants' marital status**

	Single	Married	De facto	Divorced	Widowed	Uncertain	Total
Female	6	98	3	1	3	1	112
Male	16	22	0	2	0	0	40

As noted above, there was much less attrition than might be expected in a longitudinal study with this kind of mobile population: of the 152 participants who started, only 27 withdrew before the end of the study.

The three main causes for the attrition were:

- participants finished their AMEP hours and opted out of the project
- participants found work and withdrew from the project
- participants travelled overseas for extended periods.

The following chapters address the research questions through an analysis of how participants engaged with English inside and outside the AMEP during the one-year period of their early settlement in Australia.

#### Notes

1 Research software that assists in the coding, classification and storage of qualitative data.

# Chapter 2

## Goals and pathways



# Chapter 2

## Goals and pathways

In order to address research questions related to participants' actual and intended engagement with English, the data were analysed for what the participants said about their goals and plans for the future and the steps they had taken towards those goals during the data collection period.

### 2.1 Participant goals: overall patterns

Most of the goals expressed by participants related to typical indicators of settlement success (see, for example, Khoo and McDonald 2001) and involved language learning, further education/training and employment. While such goals were expressed by all participants, there were some differences in the degree of clarity with which they were understood and articulated. Some participants clearly articulated specific goals that seemed achievable and for which they had identified clear pathways. Others had goals that were less concrete or were unrealistic, and did not seem to have clear pathways in mind. Some overall trends were evident.

- There were differences between CSWE levels, both in focus and in awareness of educational pathways. Participants at CSWE III level were generally better able to articulate their goals and identify pathways to reach them.
- Those with well-defined professional ambitions were clearer about the pathways to working in their chosen professions in Australia. These were mostly at CSWE III level.
- Some wished to continue their pre-migration occupations, while others did not.
- Those who did not have clear and attainable employment goals had to refocus on appropriate goals and pathways.
- English-language competence was identified as a barrier to appropriate employment and this realisation was intensified at lower CSWE levels, although there was not always great clarity on exactly what was required or how to focus on improving their English. In some cases, awareness of this reality developed over time.
- At lower levels there was greater uncertainty and volatility of goals and plans.
- Setting up a small business was appealing to many participants, but few had a clear idea of how to do this or a plan to pursue. Many were also interested in enrolling in translating courses.
- Younger learners were more likely to aspire to professional careers and take time to study, while older participants, in particular those with young children, felt pressured to earn income and meet childcare needs.
- Among women across all CSWE levels, there was widespread interest in courses in childcare, aged care or the beauty therapy industry. However, by the end of data collection, few of them had commenced study in these areas.

The next section examines differences evident among participants at different CSWE levels.

### 2.2 Goals and plans across CSWE levels

#### 2.2.1 CSWE III

More participants at CSWE III seemed able to plan concretely for their future employment and employment pathways than those at lower levels, and this may have been a reflection of their high level of education and professional background. Those who had a clear idea of what they wanted to do were able to plan their pathways and take concrete steps towards their goals, as in the case of William, a refugee from Sudan.

William, C05, CSWE III

William had been one of the lost boys from Sudan. In his mid-thirties at the start of the project, he learned English and had learned other languages in refugee camps before coming to Australia in April 2008. In Quarter 1 (Q1) he realised that he had a talent for languages, which he could use for the benefit of the community, and he expressed a desire to do a translation course. William started a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Certificate II-level course in Interpreting and Translating in Quarter 3 (Q3), which he completed in Quarter 4 (Q4). At the end of the project he was working as a part-time/casual interpreter and translator. He was also

continuing his English studies through distance education, as well as self-study towards a higher National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters accreditation rating.

Of all the levels, participants at CSWE III were more likely to be planning to work in their pre-migration occupations, and this was the intention of 20 of the 73 CSWE III participants. Where participants' pre-migration occupations were clearly defined professions or roles, the pathway to reach their goal was clearer to them.

Danielle, C06, CSWE III

Danielle was in her mid-thirties when she arrived from the Philippines in January 2008, where she had been a midwife for 11 years. In Q1 she was still completing the requirements to get her qualifications recognised in Australia. She had found out that she also needed to attain an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 7 in order to be eligible.

CSWE III participants often seemed to have greater knowledge of the Australian context before migration, and tended to start with much more specific plans for further education. Some of those planning continuing education were well informed and articulate, showing a detailed knowledge about their chosen pathways, especially as time progressed. They also more often had a keener understanding of the level of language required of the specific job they had in mind, as in the cases of Tomoko and Lourdes.

Tomoko, C10, CSWE III

Tomoko, 31, arrived in Australia from Japan in March 2008. Her profession there was a midwife. She found a job in aged care soon after the Q1 interview, which she saw as a step towards her goal. In Quarter 2 (Q2) she found out that she needed an IELTS score of 7 and would need to do a bridging course in order to work as a nurse or midwife in Australia. She was studying English part-time to achieve this goal by Q3. By Q4 she had found out that if she could get her IELTS score to 7 within two years of having practised midwifery in Japan, she would not need to do a bridging course, so she was focusing on achieving that level at the end of the project.

Lourdes, C02, CSWE III

In the Philippines Lourdes had 14 years of education, which included primary and secondary schooling. The language of instruction was Tagalog, and she studied English as a foreign language. After completing her 510 hours in the AMEP, she applied for an 'English for further studies' course at TAFE, and completed this in June 2009. She wanted to pursue nursing studies and she seemed quite aware of the kind of language requirements for the job in relation to her own needs.

### *Lourdes, C02, CSWE III, Q2*

'What I need ... is more on writing ... more grammar ... because when you study in in like we we I study enrolled nurse ... you're doing a lot of writing ... like doing reports ...'

However, even at CSWE III, many participants were still uncertain as to the level and type of language skills that would be required to join the workforce, not only for the specific jobs they had in mind, but also for entrance into the labour market and the Australian work system more generally. Of 73 participants at CSWE III, 33 appeared to have a concrete sense of the language skills that they needed to improve for specific purposes, an idea of the types of institutions they would enrol in, and some kind of timeframe and action plan. Twenty-one of these were able to name an advanced English course (eg English for Foreign Students, Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)) that they planned to take, and ten were aware of the need to concentrate on particular skills in which they were weak or which were needed for their future plans. All spoke of their ultimate goals in terms of gaining employment. However, 30 participants at this level were less concrete about their language-learning goals and spoke in vague terms about how to achieve them. For 26 of them, their plans were on hold because they were expecting changes in their personal circumstances or were uncertain about their English-language levels.

Some, like Anna, became increasingly aware of the enormity of the task of reaching the level of proficiency required for their previous professions and opted for retraining.

Anna, C09, CSWE III

Before migrating to Australia, Anna had been an ophthalmologist in China for 16 years. Upon arrival she found a job via the internet as a quality control officer at a glasses factory, but she found the job was frustrating because it was below her skill level and did not allow much opportunity to communicate in English, as the boss discouraged talk at work. From the start of the study, Anna spoke of clearly defined professional goals, which she reassessed and redefined throughout the project. Initially, her primary concern was getting her qualifications recognised in Australia. She understood that her English needed to improve dramatically before she would be able to work in her field and began rigorous studies, dedicating five hours a day to online English practice. A high achiever used to succeeding, she was frustrated at how long it took to improve her language despite her strenuous efforts. Halfway through the study, Anna decided that her goal of being an

ophthalmologist in Australia was unrealistic and she refocused, planning to sit IELTS in order to study at TAFE to become an Australian-qualified optician.

Many participants with prior qualifications faced the option of either retraining or further training in order to pursue their previous occupations, while others faced a complete change in direction and consequent periods of uncertainty as they adjusted to their new roles. Those with a clearly defined profession or occupation in mind found this easier.

There was certainly some awareness that having qualifications recognised did not translate into the knowledge required for the workplace, nor in automatic employment. For some, like Peter, who left the project soon after he joined to work in another city, the realisation that qualifications and experience were not recognised in Australia was very demotivating.

Peter, C09, CSWE III

Peter had worked as a builder in Germany, Austria, the Emirates and in his home country, Bulgaria. He took great pride in the fact that he was a third-generation builder and had worked in the industry for his entire adult life. However, new regulations in Australia meant that it had not been possible for him to be a builder on arrival. He also saw cultural differences in ways of working and the use of languages other than English in the industry as barriers to becoming a builder here and so he refocused his goals for employment. He held a number of jobs in Australia that did not require much English, including pizza delivery, cleaning, maintenance and manual labour. He felt that at 40 he could not commit to the three years of full-time study necessary to qualify as a builder in Australia. Although he judged his oral communication skills to be adequate, he felt that others with higher English-language proficiency would be selected before him. Peter has enrolled in some classes with the Master Builders Association to qualify as a building inspector, which he regarded as a bad job with good pay.

However, while 33 participants mentioned concrete plans to move towards their employment goals and seemed to have a reasonable knowledge of the labour market in their current or desired fields, only 11 of these participants had already found a satisfactory arrangement or were confident of their planned courses of action. While ten participants planned to set up small businesses, only two were certain about this plan and seemed to be clear on how to proceed. Young Soon was able to take a longer-term view in taking the steps towards her goal of owning and operating a livestock farm.

Young Soon, C10, CSWE III

Young Soon's family arrived in Australia with a specific business plan in mind. They had hoped to pursue her husband's lifelong dream of owning and operating a livestock farm. From the first interview, Young Soon seemed flexible in the employment goals for herself and her family, and when their goals proved more difficult to reach than they had initially thought, she was able to re-adjust and take a longer-term view without abandoning her goal. Her husband opened a takeaway sushi shop and Young Soon's participation in this family shop increased over time as her children became more settled in Australia.

Although they were able to articulate their plans in concrete and realistic terms, 22 participants at CSWE III felt that external factors beyond their control made it difficult to formulate these plans precisely. These factors included family commitments, language skills, financial limitations, and the need to acquire or gain recognition for qualifications. Nearly a quarter of those who said they wanted to do further training or education of some kind gave these factors as reasons why they needed to take a longer-term view when planning their futures. The 40 participants who did not articulate any clear employment-related plans seemed uncertain about the level of language skill they would need in order to join the workforce, and showed less knowledge of the labour market in their specific fields and the Australian system in general.

Thus, even though proportionally more participants at CSWE III level were able to articulate clear goals and pathways, there was still considerable uncertainty, suggesting an important role for educational counselling.

### 2.2.2 CSWE II

Almost all participants at CSWE II level (18 out of 22) reported that their English proficiency was not sufficient to attain employment. This led some, like Johnny, to reassess their employment goals.

Johnny, C01, CSWE II

Johnny was a bank manager for 16 years in Taiwan, but doubted he would be able to work in a similar profession in Australia because of his English-language level. His goal, instead, was to secure any reasonably paid blue-collar job where his language skills would not pose a problem. After six months in Australia, Johnny was taking steps to improve his proficiency in business English through self-study. He was interested in mechanics and hoped to enrol in an introductory mechanics course at TAFE in a year's time. As his wife was earning sufficient income to support them both, his primary aim in finding employment was not financial, but to practise and use his English. Johnny found employment as a fencer for four months. Working with people from a variety of backgrounds in this job helped him to gain in communicative competence and confidence. Although he was

not entirely certain about exactly which occupation he would ultimately pursue, Johnny was realistic and goal-oriented in his approach to seeking employment in Australia in this early stage of his settlement.

Other participants still seemed to be coming to terms with the limitations of their level of language proficiency for the requirements of their past or desired professions. Many did not seem to have a very clear picture of what they needed to do to improve, and although they had a future direction in mind, they did not always seem equipped to pursue it. Only five out of 22 participants reported concrete plans for their language learning, while 12 articulated goals in more general terms (such as a general need to improve English to be able to function appropriately in everyday life) and only had a vague idea of the courses they might take.

Most participants at this level spoke of working in a skilled or semi-skilled field, such as in human resource administration, a beauty salon, hairdresser or as a plumber. Although they provided rational reasons for these goals, most had not yet started gathering the information they needed to pursue the pathway to these goals systematically. While 15 participants reported the need to undertake further study or training in order to access jobs, only two showed a degree of planning towards their goals; three undertook a course in childcare but changed their minds about wanting to enter this field; two took a course in business only because it was free of charge; and eight said that they wanted to resume their previous occupations, but did not know how and had not started the process of gaining the relevant information.

In general, participants at CSWE II level talked about their employment goals in vague terms. Thus, while seven seemed to have the general desire to set up in business rather than seek employment, they did not articulate this wish in very concrete terms. Rather, it seemed that the idea of running a small business was an appealing alternative to the perceived challenges of entering the labour market. They did not, however, generally display precise knowledge of either the nature of the businesses they intended to run or the market conditions for setting them up.

Like those at higher levels, participants at CSWE II reported external factors beyond their control, such as family commitments, health concerns and travel plans that impacted on their plans, although their high level of awareness of these was a first step in working out possible successful options.

However, it was noticeable that there was more volatility in plans among CSWE II participants, who tended to change plans from quarter to quarter more than the other two groups. Some completed a course and then decided to go in another direction, as illustrated in the cases below.

Hogan, C01, CSWE II

Hogan is a 40-year-old male who arrived in Australia from China in February 2006. In Q1 he thought he would like to study at TAFE to do structural engineering. In Q2 he said he wanted to start some kind of business.

Lia, C01, CSWE II

Lia, 27, arrived in Australia from Indonesia in December 2007. In Q1 she wanted to improve her English through a course and work. She wanted to do a bridging course in preparation for her university major but was unsure of her plans. She also said that she wanted to have her own pet shop. In Q2 she said she wanted to work in a laboratory, and do a TAFE course for this. She also expressed interest in a finance course.

Revaka, C01, CSWE II

Revaka is a 28-year-old from India who arrived in Australia in December 2007. After her AMEP course, she enrolled in a Preparation for Childcare Services course. She did a practicum in the childcare course but eventually decided she did not want to work in this field. Her career plans changed over the course of the data collection from initially being interested in childcare to wanting to be a beautician. As of May 2009, she wanted to pursue a course at TAFE as a dental assistant.

Overall, few participants at this level seemed to have either clear goals or pathways, and those who were able to identify goals often changed these over time.

### 2.2.3 CSWE I and pre-CSWE

Participants at CSWE I level and pre-CSWE were also often vague about their goals and often talked about plans that were clearly unrealistic. Language was perceived as a barrier to being able to take control of their futures. This seemed to contribute to a feeling of powerlessness. Twenty-six of the 57 participants at these levels made constant reference to their lack of language skills as a major impediment to finding a job or even to accessing information on what might be available to them, and all acknowledged the need for further language learning. However, while 14 participants reported on plans for language learning, only one of these could be regarded as concrete. Strong wishes were often expressed in unrealistic, vague terms (eg 'perfect English') or related to their own children (eg 'wish to learn English to help them learn'). While they sometimes

related their inability to make concrete plans to a lack of English-language skills, they did not seem to have clear ideas on what might constitute 'sufficient skills' or to know about how to tackle the problem beyond enrolling in LLNP classes.

At some point over the course of the project, just under half (25) of these participants spoke concretely about the type of employment they would like and how to find a job. While 13 participants expressed the desire to find jobs that were the same or related to the ones they had pre-migration, they did not seem to know much about the pathways they needed to follow in order to achieve their goals, nor about the related labour market. Very few seemed to have sufficient information on the Australian vocational system to enable them to weigh up training options. However, the four participants who wanted to open their own businesses seemed to be quite informed about the market conditions and what they needed to explore before they did so. Four mentioned wanting to pursue other forms of training in order to find jobs.

However, most participants had no clear plans; in some cases, they did not even seem able to articulate clear expectations for their future, the reasons for their choices or to know the necessary steps to be taken to achieve them. As at other levels, many (45) participants were uncertain about their plans because of factors such as family commitments and travel. However, the data show that almost all were optimistic and had a positive view about their lives in Australia.

A significant proportion of CSWE I and pre-CSWE participants had extended families or belonged to established communities in Australia, which helped them with their initial settlement needs. At least five of these reported that this was most likely to be their route to employment. Although there was a view that employment would give them the opportunity to improve their language skills, one participant reported that he had found a job in a factory through friends where he will not need to speak English.

Overall, the level of education and English proficiency seemed to have the most impact on participants' ability to express their goals and formulate plans. It was also noticeable that many women migrating on a spouse visa considered their primary role to be caring for the family, and consequently their plans and expectations in relation to language learning, further education and employment were often for the longer term, especially if they had young children. However, they were still interested in finding 'flexible options' for reconciling their role within the family and outside. Male participants more often seemed to feel the pressure to find employment in the short term, and also more often expressed the desire to pursue occupations that would be satisfying in the longer term. There did not seem to be any particular trends relating to age or language background, although, as noted above, strong first language (L1) networks were able to offer contacts for employment, sometimes in an L1 environment.

## 2.3 Pursuing goals

Generally, those participants who had a specific profession or goal in mind were better able to take up appropriate pathways, even if the final outcome was not the one they had anticipated. Having a clear goal seemed to help them to find out more information about the profession itself and related areas and to decide to embark on further training. It also seemed to help them if it became necessary to change direction or adapt to unexpected circumstances.

Kristina, C01, CSWE II

Kristina is a 23-year-old from Lithuania, where she completed a certificate in tourism. In Lithuania she worked as a waitress and, except for a practicum as part of a certificate in tourism, she did not have much experience in this field. After her arrival in Australia, Kristina worked in a Lithuanian club as a bartender, and throughout the data collection period she continued to explore the possibility of remaining in the field of hospitality. In the Q4 interview, she said she was delighted that a TAFE institution had accepted her tourism qualification from Lithuania as sufficient to work in the tourism industry in Australia. She planned to apply for a job as a flight attendant that she had seen advertised and also to travel agents. She may still enrol in TAFE for a six-month tourism course to familiarise herself with the general English and specialist industry terms.

Vinny, C01, CSWE II

Vinny had been a primary school teacher in India but from the beginning of the project she wanted to pursue a career in customer service. After finishing her AMEP English course, she tried to find a job but had no luck, so she returned to English classes, this time at level III. She then enrolled in a part-time course in Human Resource Management at TAFE. She stopped her English course in order to enrol in the AMEP's Employment Pathway Program. As part of this, she undertook three weeks of work experience in administration at the educational institution where she was studying. This improved her confidence and self-esteem tremendously and she has started looking for a customer relations or human resource job at the same time as she is studying English with the AMEP through distance learning.

Participants' perceptions that their language skills were a barrier to employment often meant they were uncertain about what options were available to them and this delayed their decisions to take up further training or education. This led some participants to take any job that was available, even if it did not satisfy their expectations or fit in with their aspirations. Sometimes this limited the time available to them to continue studying English, as in the case of Li Ming.

Li Ming, C08, CSWE I

Li Ming came from China, where she had completed 11 years of education and had worked, first, in a factory and later in a cosmetics company. Her husband also came from China but had lived in Australia for some time before he met Li Ming. Although she had helped to run a small family business (a milk bar) since her arrival in 2000, her English was still basic. Her pregnancy soon after her arrival had delayed her plans to improve her English, and in Q3 and Q4 she worked as a casual cleaner. These work and family responsibilities made it difficult to find the time to devote to the study of English.

### *Li Ming, C08, CSWE I, Q3*

Researcher (R): Okay, you've finished the 510 hours?

Li Ming: Yes, this is

R: And so is that enough English for you or do you want to learn more?

Li Ming: [laughter] Now not enough free time. I want to study English now

R: Okay, right.

Li Ming: Now is working. [laughter]

R: But now you've got to find the free time?

Li Ming: Yeah. [laughter]

However delayed, Li Ming's plans became clearer as she found renewed motivation in learning English in order to open her own takeaway shop.

### *Li Ming, C08, CSWE I, Q3*

Interpreter (Int): Yeah, very eager to learn English well because

R: Okay.

Int: PI- planning to buy a takeaway shop

R: Okay.

Int: Next – next half year, so English becomes very important for me because you have to talk with customers.

At pre-CSWE and CSWE I, early comments were often focused on learning English, and participants said very little about other areas of study. By Q3 and Q4 they talked more about possible educational pathways, as in the case of Roland.

Roland, C11, pre-CSWE

Roland, originally from Kenya, arrived in Australia from South Africa in 2004 as a teenager. In Q4 he said he would like to train to be a mechanic but needed to pass Certificate IV first, which he wanted to do part-time. In the meantime, he wanted to apply for a dump truck driver's licence to get a job in a mine.

Bernie, C07, CSWE I

Bernie, 24, arrived in Australia from Burundi in August 2007. Bernie had lived in a refugee camp but in his home country he had studied electronic engineering for six months. In Q3 he said that he wanted to continue to learn about electronics, and eventually get work in that area. He said he wanted to do a vocational course at TAFE, possibly electronics, but knew that his English would need to be better to be accepted into such a course. In Q4 he was enrolled in two programs, the LLNP and a course in construction at TAFE. At the end of the data collection period he was working in an abattoir.

The example of Bernie demonstrates another trend found with some participants, especially males, who said they wanted to get less labour-intensive job but were well aware that they needed to improve their English first, and hoped to do this by further study. The following section reports on the employment outcomes for the participants.

## 2.4 Employment outcomes during the study

As discussed above, employment was a goal for most participants in the longer term, if not immediately. Generally, employment is considered to be one indicator of settlement success and impacts directly on satisfaction and wellbeing in many ways, as well as providing an income. These include increased psychological and physical health, self-esteem and social contact, as well as helping to establish language and cultural understanding, social roles and connections, and a sense of security (Lester 2005; Phillimore and Goodson 2008).

When migrants arrive in Australia they often experience a sharp drop in the status of jobs compared with pre-migration levels, particularly if their English proficiency is low, they are refugees, have a family or had a very high-status occupation pre-migration. However, this generally improves over time, and this improvement is related to a number of variables, including language proficiency in English, so that occupational status in early settlement is not necessarily a reliable indicator of the roles they will be able to access after a number of years (Chiswick, Lee and Miller 2002).

However, starting in employment too soon can disadvantage migrants, and those who seek employment at the expense of their language development can easily get trapped into low-skilled, manual jobs or short-term work (Norton 2000; Villenas 2001; Masterman-Smith and Pocock 2008). The point at which it is beneficial to seek employment for an migrant depends on a variety of factors, including financial pressures, English-language level and self-esteem. Lester (2005) warns against assuming that employment is always the principal factor in satisfaction and successful settlement. Moreover, a job does not necessarily confer greater opportunities to develop language skills (Teutsch-Dwyer 2001) and may, in fact, slow down or inhibit language development for a variety of reasons. In some employment situations workers find themselves using a limited range of language and thus merely become confident in using a restricted English rather than extending their language development. Migrants often find themselves in workplaces where their first language or some language other than English is spoken (Goldstein 1997, 2001; Norton 2000). In others, they may be explicitly forbidden to talk. Such experiences were also reported by our participants.

Of the 152 participants, 49% (73) reported finding work at some time during the one-year data collection period. Thus a little more than half of the participants in the study (79 or 51%) did not report working in paid employment during the period of the study. There did not seem to be any clear trends for CSWE level, age, gender and years of schooling on whether or not participants found employment, although, as discussed below, only CSWE III participants found employment similar to their pre-migration work. While a large number of those employed came from CSWE III (39 out of 73 compared to 14 from CSWE II and 20 from CSWE I), these figures reflect to a certain extent the higher representation of participants at CSWE III and I in the sample. Nevertheless, fewer participants at CSWE I were employed (44% of all participants at this level as opposed to 63% of those at CSWE II and 53% at CSWE III), suggesting that at this beginner level, their proficiency in English may have been a handicap. It is interesting to note, however, that employment was highest among participants at CSWE II level, not CSWE III level. As discussed above, participants at CSWE III level expressed a clearer idea of their education and employment pathways than did those at lower levels, and this included several who planned to finish studying before looking for work. This may explain why this group did not have the highest percentage of employment. At CSWE III, a higher percentage of male participants were employed (55%, 22 male, versus 46%, 51 female).

With the exception of the 55+ age group, where the numbers were small (7) and only one found employment, age did not seem to be a factor, as approximately half of the participants in each of the other age groups found employment. Participants with the most education (13+ years) comprised the majority of the participants (59%, 90 participants) and, of these, 46% (41) were employed. Although the numbers were small, it was those with four to seven years of schooling who were the most likely to be employed (6 out of a total of 9). Most (76%) of those employed, like most (79%) of the participants, were married. Migration stream did not seem to be a factor, as approximately half of participants who entered Australia in each of the migration stream categories (family, humanitarian and skilled) were employed.

In line with previous research (eg Chiswick, Lee and Miller 2002), most found employment in this period that was below the level of their previous occupations, so that most found employment at the lower skill level of the Australian Standard Classification of Occupations (ASCO), as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Current participant employment by ASCO major group classification**

ASCO major group classification name and number	No. of participants
(1) Managers and administrators	1
(2) Professionals	6
(3) Associate professionals	7
(4) Tradespersons and related workers	4
(6) Intermediate clerical, sales and service workers	14
(7) Intermediate production and transport workers	3
(8) Elementary clerical, sales and service workers	14
(9) Labourers and related workers	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

The range of employment types undertaken by participants is listed in Table 2.2.

**Table 2.2: Participant employment types**

Employment type
Cafe or restaurant staff
Nail/beauty salon technician
Factory worker (optical, food and dry good factories)
Kitchen hand
Cleaner
Massage therapist
Takeaway shop assistant
Building construction labourer
News agency/milk bar assistant
Fast food assistant
Hotel housekeeping worker
Shop assistant (in various establishments such as bakery, store, perfume shop)
Bar tender
Agricultural farmhand
Driver
Handyman
Security guard
eBay buyer and seller
Clinic receptionist
Childcare assistant
Tram officer
Laboratory manufacturing worker
Aged care facility worker (as either cleaner or kitchen hand)

Only 11 (15%) of participants found work in fields related to their previous occupations. These were mostly females at CSWE III, as shown in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3: Participants who found employment related to their pre-migration occupations**

Occupation pre- and post-migration	CSWE level	Gender
Musician	CSWE I	Male
Construction surveyor	CSWE III	Female
Landscape architect	CSWE III	Female
Freelance interpreter	CSWE III	Male
Design company general manager	CSWE III	Male
Health and beauty import business owner	CSWE III	Female
Food and general goods shop owner	CSWE III	Male
L1 (Japanese) travel agent	CSWE III	Male
L1 (Japanese) teacher	CSWE III	Female
L1 (Mandarin) university tutor	CSWE III	Female
Web designer	CSWE III	Female

The number of years that participants had been in Australia did not seem to be a factor in whether or not they gained employment comparable to the level of their pre-migration occupations during the period of the study. Some worked in a freelance capacity, while others found employment in which they were able to make use of their professional skills and training.

Charles, C05, CSWE III

Charles is a married Colombian male who enrolled in the AMEP in CSWE III. He has one child. At the time of the interview he had only been in the country for a few months. He worked as an industrial designer in his home country. In the first half of the data collection period, he did not expect to secure work, as he wanted to concentrate on his English. However, he found work as a team leader in a furniture company. His work required a lot of interactions in English, which he found quite challenging.

Karen, C09, CSWE III

Karen, a Chinese female who enrolled in a part-time evening class at CSWE III, is recently married and has no children. In China she worked as a landscape designer. During Q1 of data collection she worked in her uncle's newspaper shop but by Q2 she had found work in a landscaping company. Although this was not exactly the kind of landscaping that she had studied, she felt comfortable because the work itself was not so challenging and she could do it well while she worked on developing her communication skills with colleagues and customers.

Of the 78 (51%) participants who did not have paid employment during the period of the study, some chose not to work because they felt that they first needed to improve their English, while others had domestic responsibilities or were pursuing further study. Some were looking for work but were unsuccessful. Of the nine participants who reported being unable to find work:

- five were female and four were male
- four were CSWE I participants, two were CSWE II and three were CSWE III
- four arrived under the family visa scheme and five under the humanitarian scheme
- seven were married and two were single.

Ten of the females who were not employed were doing volunteer work or work experience in preparation for finding employment.

The remaining participants were either unsuccessful in seeking employment or not seeking employment because of their personal circumstances or study goals (see below).

As discussed in the following chapter, the amount of English that participants used at work varied enormously, so that, for some, employment facilitated their English-language development, while for others it was more of a hindrance. Some participants explicitly chose not to work in order to further their studies, while others tried to manage both, as discussed below. The extent to which participants' language-learning experiences in the AMEP were helpful in gaining and continuing in employment is discussed in Chapter 4.

## 2.5 Education post-AMEP – outcomes

This section examines participants' educational pathways after leaving AMEP and their impressions of post-AMEP education.

At the end of Q4, just under half of the participants who started the project (47.3%) were involved in some form of post-AMEP education. Some were still in the AMEP, having not yet completed their allocated hours, or having been granted additional hours. Those who did not continue with their education gave various reasons for this: some left because they needed paid employment to support families, some could not afford the fees, while others, like Cherry, had childcare responsibilities.

Cherry, C01, CSWE II

Cherry arrived in Australia from China in November 2007 and is 24 years old. In Q1 she said she wanted to study more English and then enrol in a Child Service Course at TAFE, but she changed her mind after the birth of her first child, choosing to stay at home to take care of him.

Table 2.4 was compiled using data from across all four quarterly interviews and shows the actual and planned participation in post-AMEP education of the 152 participants during the data collection period. In each of the columns, the numbers of those who enrolled in courses are given, with the numbers of those who expressed an interest in the particular type of education given in brackets. Some of the participants who expressed an interest in courses went on to do them and are therefore also reported among the numbers of enrolments. As noted above, some participants changed their minds during the project, and so they expressed interest in a number of different courses. Not all of the participants had the opportunity to enrol in courses before the end of data collection. The actual number of enrolments may be higher, as some participants withdrew from the project and others were not contactable in Q4.

**Table 2.4: Post-AMEP education by CSWE level**

CSWE level	Post-AMEP	ESL	Vocational focus		University
			Work exp.	Vocational	
Pre-CSWE/ CSWE I (4 centres: 57 participants)	15/26.3%	14/24.5% (4/7%)	1/1.8%(1/1.8%)	1/1.8%(10/17.5%)	(2/3.5%)
II (2 centres: 22 participants)	13/59%	5/22.7% (4/18%)	5/22.7%	5/22.7% (8/36%)	(2/9%)
III (5 centres: 73 participants)	44/60.2%	21/28.7% (16/21.9%)	18/24.6% (2/2.7%)	7/9.5% (16/21.9%)	2/2.7% (15/20.5%)

The column headed 'Post-AMEP' shows the number and percentage of participants at each CSWE level who undertook post-AMEP courses. The next four columns show the kind of courses that they studied. They include English as a Second Language (ESL) courses (which cover further English-language study including LLNP, English for Further Study or English for Academic Purposes), 'Vocational focus' courses and 'University-level' courses. 'Vocational focus' courses are either work experience courses provided by AMEP service providers (which usually include class instruction on expectations in the workplace and a work placement or Employment Pathway Program courses and other locally provided courses) or vocational courses provided by registered training organisations. 'University courses' include foundation studies and undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The total number of courses may be greater than the number of participants because some did more than one course.

It can be seen from Table 2.4 that, while there was a high rate of participation in post-AMEP education among CSWE III and II (approximately 60.2% and 59% respectively), this was much lower (26.3%) at CSWE I. Thus there were not only lower levels of employment among CSWE I participants (see above), but also lower levels of post-AMEP education. Although participants from all levels expressed the desire to do vocational and even university courses in the future, the vast majority (all except one) who actually went on to do a vocational course were in CSWE II and III, and the only participants enrolled at university level were in CSWE III. Many of the CSWE III participants went on to higher levels of ESL, with the majority of these doing courses such as English for Academic Purposes.

While a number of participants enrolled in education at CSWE III also had part-time or full-time jobs, the vast majority of CSWE I participants with jobs did not continue with study. Only one was identified as doing both.

Tina, C03, CSWE I

Tina arrived from Vietnam in 2006 and is 26. She worked in a nail salon, her former profession, in Q2 and in food manufacturing in Q3. During Q3 she was also enrolled in English evening classes at TAFE.

Four participants at CSWE II undertook study and work in the same quarter (see the case of Lily below). These constitute about 30% of participants at this level who were enrolled in further education. Lily's case is an example of this.

Lily, C01, CSWE II

Lily arrived in Australia from China in 2007 and is 24 years old. When she finished her AMEP hours she enrolled in a Preparation for Children Services Course, which she completed. She also did a practicum in a childcare centre. After this, she completed Certificate III in Children's Services with Mission Australia, and then she did further study in English at TAFE. The entire time she was studying, Lily worked in a Chinese bakery.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants at CSWE III level expressed a clearer idea of their education and employment pathways than did those at lower levels, and this included several who planned to finish studying before looking for work. This may explain why this group did not have the highest percentage of employment, as discussed above. Some, however, wanted to work but found that their level of English was an impediment to finding the type of employment they wanted. Of those who enrolled in post-AMEP courses, 10 (22%) were also working.

Sanjay, C02, CSWE III

Sanjay is a 33-year-old male with a young family who arrived in Australia from India 16 years ago. When he arrived in Australia he did not speak English and found it difficult to find work. He worked on farms in Queensland where there was little opportunity to use English, as most farm workers were also from non-English-speaking backgrounds. On his return to Sydney, he found factory work and was able to use English more often. In Q1, while working as a taxi driver, Sanjay applied for a real estate agent course. He believed this course and this avenue of employment offered his family a better future. By Q2 he had completed one semester and was half-way through the course. By Q4 he had completed the course and intended to apply for a real estate licence and look for work in the industry. He continues to work as a taxi driver.

A number, like Danielle, found it too difficult to manage both study and employment, and chose to withdraw from study.

Danielle, C06, CSWE III

Danielle arrived in Australia from the Philippines in January 2008 and is in her mid-thirties. She worked as a nursing aide and midwife before coming to Australia. At the time of data collection she was working two jobs, one in an airline lounge and the other in a fast food outlet. She found this very demanding and stressful and she had to give up her AMEP hours in September 2008 because she could not manage to study English and do these jobs.

As far as participants' experiences of post-AMEP courses is concerned, overall the following trends were identified:

- many participants who continued with post-AMEP English-language courses found the expectations and workload very demanding
- participants planning vocational courses post-AMEP appreciated some guidance on relevant content
- AMEP job-related programs were popular
- the experience of some participants illustrates some of the issues in planning post-AMEP pathways.

Those who went on to further English classes reported a 'big jump' in both the level of English and the 'strictness' of class in the post-AMEP courses. Some of those going on to vocational courses or vocational English courses said they would like the AMEP to do more preparation for these courses, and less everyday language. They cited specific examples of course content that helped them, such as preparing a curriculum vitae (CV) or preparing for job applications, as expressed by the participants in the following two examples.

***Kristina, C01, CSWE II, Q3***

Kristina: Of this yeah. I think is. It was useful for me about when [name teacher] [laughter] uhm teach – teach us about work how to improve our English in workplace. [laughter]

R: Hm.

Kristina: It was useful for me. How to write CV. How to write cover letter. Everything about workplace.

R: Uhmhm.

***Violet, C06, CSWE III, Q2***

R: Well, that's fantastic. Wonderful. And so you're in 4A.

Violet: A now yeah.

R: Right and what is that, academic class or

Violet: No for

R: Any special class or,

Violet: Yeah, for job seeking.

R: Job seeking.

Violet: Yeah. And I – I learned – learned in there many kind of job, Australian op–, employment context.

R: Oh, yeah.

Violet: Yeah, so we lots research about one of – one of specific job and we try to writing complaint letter and we change the formal writing.

R: Oh, yes.

Violet: And send email and

R: Like a formal email to people?

Violet: Yes to boss or I think. And we practise a lot of that. And actually about listening and reading tests also concern with, employment context in Australia. So it help me a lot yeah.

R: It sorry? It helps you a lot?

Violet: Yes.

Learners often reported that they liked AMEP job-related programs, either local programs such as 'Work It Out' (a program offered in Tasmania, which involved a two-week work placement preceded by workplace preparation and followed by classes building on the experience) or the Employment Pathway Program (a DIAC-funded Employment Preparation Program pilot), and that these helped with their planning.

**Zhi Li, C10, CSWE III**

Zhi Li arrived in Australia from China in September 2002. She is 39 years old. Her former occupation was as a laboratory chemist. In Q3 she spoke about enjoying working in a laboratory during the 'Work It Out' program, and wanting to do a two-year diploma course in chemistry. She found out that, with her past experience, she could do the diploma in one year.

**Pita, C10, CSWE III**

Pita arrived in Australia from Peru in November 2007. She is 35. In Q3 Pita said that the 'Work It Out' program work placement, as a receptionist in a women's health centre, had helped her learn about life in Australia.

The experiences of some participants also illustrate some of the issues related to the planning and following through of post-AMEP educational pathways. For example, Chin Chin did not have the prerequisite English-language skills for a Certificate III course relevant to her employment goals and yet enrolled in a course anyway. However, although she passed the practical component, she was not able to pass the certificate because of her English-language proficiency.

Chin Chin, C08, CSWE I

Chin Chin, 38, came to Australia from Burma in September 2007. She was a CSWE I level learner who passed the housekeeping practical competencies in a Certificate III vocational course but did not get competencies involving language, so did not receive the certificate, but got a job regardless. She was so focused on working that she left the AMEP early and did the vocational course because she felt it would be more useful. She found a job working as a housekeeper in a hotel where there were a number of other speakers of her L1. They helped her with day-to-day communication in the workplace, but she did manage to successfully negotiate leave from work with a supervisor on her own, despite limited English.

The case of Jeannie illustrates the gap between the highest CSWE qualification and the language prerequisite for professional courses. This is an issue because there are very few English courses providing instruction in English at a level high enough to prepare migrants for university-level courses.

Jeannie, C09, CSWE III

Jeannie came to Australia from China in October 2006. She was a primary school teacher in China. She had completed CSWE Certificate III at AMEP, and was accepted into a postgraduate teacher education course, which gave her a qualification as a teacher of a Language Other than English. However, this is an unusual outcome, as this type of course requires an IELTS score of at least 6.5, while the CSWE III course equivalent is 5.0.

## 2.6 Summary and implications

In summary, this chapter has outlined the following findings related to the participants' goals and pathways:

- Participants at CSWE III level and those with well-defined professional backgrounds were better able to articulate their goals and identify pathways to reach them.
- Even participants who wanted to continue their pre-migration occupations had to refocus on appropriate goals and pathways to achieve their goals in Australia.
- At lower levels there was greater uncertainty and volatility of goals and plans.
- Setting up a small business was appealing to many participants, but few had a clear idea of how to do this or a plan to pursue. Translating courses were also popular.
- Among women, there was widespread interest in courses in childcare, aged care or the beauty therapy industry across all CSWE levels, although follow-through towards these goals was inconsistent.
- English-language competence was seen as a barrier to appropriate employment and this realisation was intensified at lower CSWE levels. In some cases, awareness of this reality developed over time.
- Some participants who went on to further English courses found the level of English required quite challenging.
- The few who found work comparable to their pre-migration occupations often also found the level of English required quite challenging.
- Younger learners were more likely to aspire to professional careers and take time to study, while older participants, in particular those with young children, felt pressure to earn income and meet childcare needs.

The pressure of earning an income and caring for family competes with the potential benefits of post-AMEP education for many participants. The analysis here has highlighted the benefits of having clear goals and good information on how to achieve them, and thus the importance of helping migrants in these early stages of settlement to formulate and clarify their goals and plan their post-AMEP pathways.

Since many did not seem to be aware of the range of possibilities available or what was needed in order to access them, sensitive and intensive educational counselling is crucial. This suggests that clients, particularly those at lower levels, should be given regular access to educational counselling throughout their study in the AMEP to assist in the identification of achievable goals and achievable pathways and time lines.

These interactions should allow sufficient time for them to clarify their goals, reach an understanding of what is required to reach them and refocus these where appropriate. As part of this process, clients should be assisted to develop a realistic understanding of their own language-learning process and progress and a focused understanding of the language proficiency required by different employment and study options.

Good information relating to popular career path choices, such as setting up a small business, translating and interpreting, and childcare, should be readily available so that clients can consider as carefully as possible the range of options available in relation to their own personal goals. This might help to avoid hasty choices and too many consequent changes in direction.

There also needs to be some attention given to the gaps and anomalies in the post-AMEP pathways illustrated by the cases of Jeannie and Chin Chin in the final part of Section 2.5.

As discussed in the following chapters, as a first point of contact with English-speaking Australia, the AMEP can play an important role in helping to address these issues.

## **Notes**

2 In order to protect the anonymity of participants, all names used in this report are pseudonyms.

# Chapter 3

## Use of English for everyday life



# Chapter 3

## Use of English for everyday life

In this chapter the contexts in which the participants reported using English and the people with whom they interacted are considered. Analysis is based largely on interview discussions regarding where participants used English and with whom. In order to identify patterns in their use of English, the number of participants who noted a particular context or situation in which they used English is also reported.

### 3.1 Use of English in everyday life

During the interviews the participants were asked to say where they used English in their daily lives, and their answers were probed, sometimes by means of a language network diagram. This is a diagram that is drawn by the researcher and the participant together on which they mark where and when and with whom the participant uses different languages. The diagram then becomes the centre of a discussion about their language use and becomes a concrete aid to reflection. Because of the nature of the interviews, not all participants were able to name specific locations in which they used English, but analysis of the interview and language network diagram data allowed researchers to distil a list of the major contexts in which they reported using English and the number of times they were mentioned by participants. These are summarised in Table 3.1, together with an indication of how frequently each context was mentioned. Thus in their interviews, 101 participants made mention of shopping as a context in which they used English, 88 told us that they used English with friends and so on. While we sought information on their use of all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), as can be seen in the table, participants most often reported speaking in English.

**Table 3.1: Contexts in which participants reported using English**

Context	No. of participants who mentioned each
Shopping	101
Friends	88
Work	74
TV	65
Private services (eg bank, real estate agent)	62
Medical services/prescriptions	59
L1 friends	53
Phone interactions	53
Newspapers	53
Internet	42
Books	40
Spouse/at home	39 (4 mix of languages)
Neighbours	39
Public services (eg Centrelink, Medicare)	37
Letters/bills	34
Public transport	28

*cont ...*

... Cont

Context	No. of participants who mentioned each
Movies	27
Random interactions	20
Social groups (volunteering, extracurricular etc)	19
Radio	19
Child's school	18
Driver's licence	18
Religion	18
Job applications/searches	16
Filling in forms	15
Childcare	14
Making an appointment	13
SMS (text messaging)	6

As can be seen from Table 3.1, overall, the contexts in which all participants reported using English were those related to settlement and everyday life and, as discussed in more detail below, these contexts were broadly similar in most cases, regardless of language or educational background or CSWE level, although, as the discussion in the next section illustrates, age did bring some variation, as the family commitments of participants varied at different stages of life.

Overall, shopping was the most frequently cited occasion for the use of English, followed by communicating with friends in English. These friends were often from another language background and so English was used as a lingua franca, as Mary's case illustrates.

Mary, C05, CSWE III

Mary is married with one child. She is from Colombia and is aged 35–44. She is newly arrived and worked as a manager in a leather company in her home country. In Q1 she states she is running her own cleaning business. She attributes her improvement in using English to having many friends from different nationalities and using only English when conversing with her friends. In Q2 she reports she is able to manage telephone conversations with various businesses to obtain information about business insurance for her husband and in Q3 says she is more confident in her conversations with the doctor and midwife, and reports further improvement in Q4 with understanding medical terminology during these visits.

Like Mary, participants also cited using English at work and to conduct service encounters in contexts where they managed their affairs, such as Centrelink, medical contexts, and at the bank and the real estate agent. Participants also reported listening to English during activities that are usually associated with entertainment, such as watching television and movies, and listening to the radio, although these were often undertaken as strategic language use exercises as much as for, or even rather than, entertainment.

The kinds of interactions that occurred in these contexts, however, varied widely. For example, although shopping was the most often cited situation in which they used English, as many pointed out, these interactions were often restricted and routine in nature. However, they were also at times unpredictable and presented challenges when all did not go smoothly. Participants cited examples of feeling inadequate in a shopping encounter or on public transport when they could not understand directions or train announcements, or had to return items at a clothes shop. One participant reported being too shy to ask for help in the supermarket, so she had to spend a long time looking for an item and then leave if unsuccessful. Many also, however, reported feeling more confident shopping as they gained in experience and proficiency.

While many participants reported feeling more comfortable talking to children, interactions around childcare could sometimes be very limited. Child groups did not always require much interaction between parents, even if they were present during activities. One participant reported how they simply executed the leader's instructions, and at her level of English (CSWE III) this did not extend her English-language use. Dealing with the children's school, however, could sometimes be challenging, and was avoided by some participants for this reason.

It is worth mentioning that 18 participants talked of undertaking religious activity in English, and for some of these the religious community offered a setting in which they could use quite a lot of English. Some participants reported attending English-language services even though in the beginning they did not really understand what was going on. Two or three reported praying in English by Q3 or Q4. Some participants attended both English language and their L1 services. For those who went to church, this often seemed to be a focal point in their lives where they made social connections, and some engaged in this activity quite regularly. For example, one participant reported going to Bible study at church on Saturday night and then attending a Sunday morning service followed by social gatherings. Another reported how, when his religious community, which had been mostly L1 speakers, decided to open up to others, he became involved in doorknocking in the community. It seems that such religious communities offered a social network, support and English. This phenomenon has been noted in other countries, for example Canada (Han 2009), and among other groups in Australia, such as international students (Terraschke 2009).

Dan, C05, CSWE III

Initially, Dan, a 16–24-year-old single student from Egypt, felt little involvement in the wider English-speaking community in Sydney, as everyone in his immediate community had the same L1 background, so that he only needed to speak Arabic. By Q2 Dan has broadened his involvement in the community through his church. He has become involved at church on both Saturdays and Sundays, interacting with teenagers who do not understand Arabic, requiring all communication to be in English. In Q4 Dan reported that his involvement in the wider community had expanded to include not only his church services (which he now preferred attending in English) but also to doing the shopping and meeting with his brother's teachers at school.

Participants less often commented on specific reading activities in English, and when they did, they often spoke of reading newspapers (often local papers or free papers), magazines and junk mail. Few participants spoke of reading books in English, and the most commonly noted book was the Bible. Participants commented least on their use of writing outside the educational context, and they spoke mostly of form-filling, although official letters were also mentioned. However, many of the contexts in which they said they used English also involved reading and writing, as well as speaking and listening. Thus using English in Centrelink or at the bank would have demanded a range of skills, including literacy. It is highly likely that the participants also read in other contexts, such as signage, packets, tickets and so on, but that they did not think to mention this specifically as reading.

Most participants reported having someone who could help them with difficult interactions. This was sometimes a spouse, a child or other family member, friend or interpreter. They often noted difficulty understanding other speakers (either because of accent or because they spoke too fast) or difficulty being understood and the embarrassment and frustration that this caused. There was particular mention by participants at all CSWE levels of anxiety in using the telephone.

Over the four quarterly interviews, participants generally reported becoming more independent and having to rely less on other people. Their increasing control over English was therefore more often reflected in greater perceived independence and confidence rather than in extension of the contexts in which they used English, although this differed considerably according to personal circumstances. Some participants increased their use of English and reported new working circumstances or joining a new social club or taking up an extracurricular activity in which they now had to use English.

For example, Lucia, a CSWE III participant from Colombia, initially said that she felt uncomfortable and limited in her English interactions with her partner's friends. At work she only had limited opportunities to extend her use of English (see below) and her partner did not correct her mistakes. However, over the period of the study she showed an increase in the contexts and roles in which she was using English, changing her job to one in which she had more speaking opportunities and joining a pottery class, so that by Q4 she felt very comfortable in Australia.

Others found that, after leaving the AMEP or having a baby, the worlds in which they used English contracted considerably and in some cases disappeared. We found that pregnant participants, those with children and older participants reported interacting more with doctors and midwives, at the hospital and so on, regardless of their level of English. Several participants who had babies during the study period found that they used English less after the birth of their children, and interpreters were often used for important appointments. Cherry, for example, found that her choice to stay at home with her baby, rather than take up a study option, severely restricted her opportunities to speak English (see also Chapter 2).

Cherry, C01, CSWE II

Cherry is a 24-year-old married Chinese female with one child (born during the project). She has been in Australia for one year and taught traditional Chinese music before coming to Australia. During Q1 and Q2, Cherry was pregnant with her first child. Apart from regular visits to her doctor, her involvement in the community was limited to attending classes and shopping with classmates after class. In Q3 Cherry reported that she spent all her time at home looking after her new baby. She applied to do a childcare course at TAFE but decided to postpone it so that she could continue breastfeeding her baby. She described this as one of the sacrifices that a mother must make. In Q4 Cherry reported that she had regular visits to the early childhood health centre. She also attends church services but these are conducted in Mandarin, and so she found that she had few opportunities to use English.

### 3.2 Variation among individuals

There was a huge variation among individuals with regard to where and to what extent they used English outside of class. In order to address the research question relating to how engagement with English differed for different groups, we examined the patterns of language use reported by participants of different ages, gender, language and cultural backgrounds, levels of education, date of arrival and CSWE levels.

As noted above, age seemed to impact the most on the kinds of contexts where participants reported using English, although this variation related more to stage of life and therefore life circumstances rather than age per se. Thus the few (seven) participants over 55 reported proportionally the most involvement in their wider communities through churches, volunteer work and social chats with neighbours, and they generally reported using English, both spoken and written, in a wider range of contexts. Only one of these participants was working and she seemed to be able to take the time to interact more widely. Participants aged 45–54 more often reported relying on someone for help with interactions, but those over 45 also seemed to speak with neighbours relatively frequently compared to younger participants.

Li Li Lin, C08, CSWE I

Li Li Lin is a 73-year-old married female from China with two children. She has been in Australia for one year and was a chemical engineer in China. She talks to her neighbours and frequently visits the local library. She makes an effort to ask questions when she is out so that she can practise her English.

Not surprisingly, perhaps, interactions with schools were reported more frequently by those over 35, and interactions involving childcare were more frequently reported by those aged 25 to 34.

Abrar, C06, CSWE III

Abrar is a married female aged 35–44 from Iraq. She has three children and has been in Australia for two years. Abrar was a doctor in her home country. Abrar's contact within the wider community involves shopping, doctor's visits, meeting with her children's teachers and interacting with her neighbours who come from diverse backgrounds.

It was not participants in the youngest age group but those between 25 and 44 who reported the highest use of the internet in English, which they used socially (email, Facebook, eBay, blogs and chat) and transactionally (job-seeking, tax online, looking for schools etc). There were also more participants in this age bracket trying to get a driving licence.

While CSWE level certainly made a difference in many cases to the degree of confidence felt by respondents in these interactions, as noted above, participants at all levels still reported interacting in a similar range of contexts. The interactions reported at lower levels (up to CSWE II) tended to be more formulaic, while those reported by participants at CSWE III were more complex. More participants at this level reported that they had stopped relying on an interpreter for medical interactions or started doing extracurricular activities such as playing music in a band, taking pottery classes or volunteering for a festival. It seems that the extra proficiency in English allowed them to participate in such activities in ways that they could contribute usefully.

At all levels participants reported restricted opportunities to use English (see Chapter 5). Many cited the AMEP as one of the few places in which they spoke English. As noted in Chapter 2, participants at lower CSWE levels also reported finding their lack of English proficiency a barrier, resulting in a lack of confidence, shyness, and loss of a sense of identity and power.

The data were analysed to see if there were any trends in the use of English that related to how long participants had been in Australia. Because they were mostly relatively new arrivals (63 participants had been here less than a year and 50 for a year, while only 22 had been here for two years; 17 had been here for more than three years: see Table 1.5), comparisons between the groups can only be indicative.

On the one hand, participants who had been in Australia longer had at least some form of contact with English-speaking friends/acquaintances etc. Social engagement of this kind was the highest proportionally among those who had been here more than four years. However, participants who had been in Australia the longest also reported less engagement with public or private service providers, religious communities or with other social groups with which they might work in a volunteer capacity. They did, however, consistently report talking to neighbours. Thus it seems that after a longer period in Australia their lives may become more settled and so they do not need to use English as frequently for some services, but that they have had more time to develop social relations through English. Not surprisingly, reliance on the support of another English-speaking family member was found to be highest among the most recent arrivals.

Researchers also examined the data to see if female and male participants reported using English in a markedly different way. As noted in Chapter 1, females (112) outnumbered males (40) in the sample. However, males reported proportionally more frequently that they used English for interactions in public service encounters and also mentioned filling in forms as something they did in English. They also reported using English for religious purposes and having interactions with friends in English more often. Proportionally, female participants reported having interactions at childcare/children's school only slightly more often than the males. They also reported proportionally slightly higher rates for relying on a family member for interactions, involvement in extracurricular activities, and using the telephone and talking to neighbours in English.

Because family responsibilities can make a difference to the need to interact in English and the opportunities that there might be to do so (Norton 2000), researchers looked to see if there were any differences in the reported interactions of females and males with children. The main difference between women with children and without children seems to be that, proportionally, both women with children and men with children report relying on someone else more often than those without children, perhaps because of the extra engagement with services and the community that parenting can bring. Proportionally, they also appear to talk to their neighbours and engage in interactions with public service providers (Centrelink, Medicare etc) slightly more than those without children. Males without children more often said they engaged in interactions when shopping, used the internet and dealt with letters in English.

The participants come from 12 different source regions that were unequally represented in the sample, so any patterns of English-language use that were noted will reflect this imbalance. Participants from South-East Asia seemed to report heavier reliance on family members and friends for certain interactions and perhaps because of the strength of their L1 networks (see Chapter 5). Together with participants from Eastern Asia, they also reported proportionally more interactions with private service providers. Eastern Asian participants reported more frequent use of the internet in English.

Participants from North Africa (five) reported interactions with childcare personnel/teachers at their children's schools and with public service providers such as Centrelink proportionally more often than any other group, and participants from all parts of Africa also reported filling in forms more frequently. They also reported using English to socialise with friends in English, perhaps since many of them have used English as medium of instruction or as a lingua franca for many years. North Africans also reported going to English-language religious gatherings relatively frequently.

Since higher levels of education tended to also mean higher levels of English, it is difficult to separate these two factors when considering when and where English was used.

### **3.3 Use of English socially**

As noted above, a common theme found across participants from all levels and backgrounds was that opportunities for social interaction in English, especially with native speakers, were very limited. Even those who had English native-speaking spouses reported feeling lonely and isolated because they could not fully communicate with the native speakers they met, and they were often left feeling like outsiders, particularly at the beginning of the data collection period. Participants at beginner and intermediate levels reported a loss of social interaction in English after they had left the AMEP.

Participants at CSWE I spoke socially in English mostly with friendly neighbours and community members who did not speak their L1, and these were often speakers of English from another language background. They found this interaction useful because these friends would help them with their English in unfamiliar situations or on the telephone. At this level, however, many reported that they lacked the confidence to put themselves in the situation where they would make English-speaking friends, preferring to stay in the comfort zone of their L1 social network. As noted in Chapter 5, this may have increased their personal comfort but may not have been an advantage for their English-language learning.

Participants at CSWE II also reported that they spoke socially in English mainly with friends from other language backgrounds, many of whom they had met at the AMEP. There was more diversity among participants at CSWE III, the largest group in the sample, yet most also reported connections with their L1 network and using English socially mainly with friends from other language backgrounds. They met these through the AMEP, at work, through spouses and housemates, religious groups, neighbours and their participation in various courses. Those who had made friends with local people found this experience very useful in increasing their confidence and feeling settled. It gave them someone they could ask for information and help, as well as someone to practise their English with.

Kamran, C05, CSWE III

Kamran is a 25–34-year-old single Iranian man. He is newly arrived in Australia and worked in information technology and as a translator in his home country. He is studying hairdressing at TAFE. He appears to have a fairly wide social network. He shares a flat with other people from diverse backgrounds, so English is used as their common language. In Q2 he explains how a very close friend who is Israeli and with whom he speaks English introduced him to some other Iranians. Because it would have been rude to speak Persian in front of his Israeli friend, they all spoke English together. In Q3 he describes his socialising with his work colleagues after work and on the weekends. In Q4 he explains that he sits and chats with friends from TAFE during breaks.

Barriers to making such friendships ranged from the previously mentioned issue of a lack of confidence to practical issues related to the time restrictions imposed by family commitments. However, they also mentioned the difficulty of understanding speakers from other language backgrounds and the difficulties of making friends in a new culture where social contacts were very different. For example, Anna (a 38-year-old married ophthalmologist whose case was included in Chapter 2) was lonely and concerned at her lack of contact with native speakers and felt she did not know how to go about making new contacts in Australia. She commented that in China people go out for a stroll after dinner and talk to neighbours, but that at that time the streets in Australia are deserted. She did not understand how to make social contacts under these circumstances. Even by Q4 she was at a loss as to how to make friends, and asked one of the researchers if it would be a good idea to go and sit in a bar by herself so that she could find people to talk to.

Whenever someone moves to a new environment, making new social connections is a challenge, but these are multiplied when simultaneously trying to understand a new culture and use a language in which proficiency is limited. As discussed further in Chapter 5, this is an unhelpful, circular situation: limited opportunities to use English mean limited opportunities to practise, which means that levels of spoken English are unlikely to improve, which can lead to a loss of confidence, which compounds the situation and so on. Social activities in larger groups were a particular challenge, and the participants often lacked the personal language that might be useful in more intimate discussion among friends. This lack of social contact was a real issue for many of the participants.

### 3.4 Use of English in the family

The family was another domain in which some participants used English, and this varied considerably according to the language background of their partners. Where the spouse was a native speaker of English, this was sometimes helpful, as in the case of Catherine, but it also sometimes created issues that might have longer-term consequences for feelings of self-esteem and identity, as in the case of Rhonda.

Catherine, C06, CSWE III

Catherine is a 16–24-year-old married female with no children. She is from South Korea and is newly arrived in Australia. She was a sales representative in Korea. She communicated in English with her husband and felt more comfortable with English in this environment than in other contexts. In Q2 she talked about how she always asks her husband about anything she does not understand when watching television. For example, he had to explain to her the ‘bad words’ used in *Summer Heights High*.

Rhonda, C03, CSWE III

Rhonda is a 31-year-old married female from Lebanon. Her husband has lived in Australia for 30 years and has been married previously. She has three step-children who do not live with them full-time and come to stay with them on weekends. Her husband and his children all speak English well and while her husband speaks Arabic with her, the children only have limited understanding of Arabic and speak English all the time. Although this English-speaking environment should be supportive for Rhonda, she in fact finds it has the opposite impact on her English-language development, and in Q1 she reported feeling that she was not learning any more English and she was not improving. In Q3 Rhonda explained that she cannot understand what the children are saying when they speak English to each other and it appears that they do not try to speak slower for her benefit or try to explain things for her.

Of the 73 participants with a partner who speaks the same L1, 34 reported predominantly using their L1 in the family, although some report trying to practise speaking English with selected members of the family or switching to English with visitors. For some, using L1 at home is a matter of principle in order to maintain their L1 proficiency, particularly with the children. For example, one participant, Hawiye, reported deliberately speaking Somali at home, and that his wife only speaks Somali. However, sometimes his children use English to each other and he may then forget and use English as well – only to be reminded by the children to speak Somali. He believes that the less Somali they use at home, the more the children will lose it. Because children often go to school where they learn English much more quickly than their parents, the issue of language maintenance in the family is an important and often emotional one. Some participants reported that their children refused to speak English with their parents at home, while others refuse to use their L1.

Hawiye, C10, CSWE III

Hawiye is a 35–44-year-old married male from Somalia. He has two children and is newly arrived in Australia. He was a businessman in Somalia. He speaks both English and Somali at home. His children speak English, having used it in South Africa prior to coming to Australia, so they are now losing their L1. In both Q1 and Q3, Hawiye said he was keen for them to maintain their L1 and so he pushed for them to use it. In Q4 he said that the more he uses English with his children, the more they lose their L1, so he did not want to use English with them at home and they will just learn it at school.

Thirteen participants whose partners speak the same L1 reported using a mix of languages at home, often L1 with the spouse but English with others, such as their children or other people's children. A few participants seemed to shift from using mostly L1 to a mix of languages. Some of the 38 participants with a partner with the same L1 who have children or grandchildren see the latter as an important source of or motivation for English-language learning. For example, one participant said that she wanted to learn English more so that she could communicate better with her child's school and help with homework and so on. Another indicated that the children were helpful as someone to practise with or help with explanations or vocabulary or interpreting, especially if the spouse refuses to practise English.

However, as noted above, language can be a source of tension. Some participants reported that their children refused to speak English with them. One reported that she had never heard her son speak English but that the neighbours had told her that he speaks it very well. Where the English proficiency of the children is high, there is also the potential that the children will make negative comments on the English-language competence of their parents, and this was reported by two participants, who said that their children have commented on their bad pronunciation or seem embarrassed about their parents' English.

Where another family member is more competent in English, they may take over interactions with the wider community or more complicated communications, and 15 participants reported that they were dependent in this way to a certain degree for their assistance in day-to-day interactions. Thus the partner with the higher level of English often took over the more demanding communicative tasks, such as negotiating with tradespeople, dealing with bills and letters, arranging appointments and interpreting at appointments. This can be particularly demotivating if the more proficient spouse is not at the same time supportive of their partner's efforts to learn and use English. One participant reported that her husband does not even want her to go shopping because of her English, although she believed she was ready to do this. Only one participant with a spouse more competent in English reported that this dependence had changed over the course of the data collection period and that she had now started to undertake interactions in the community, such as visiting the doctor, by herself.

Twenty-five participants with native-speaking partners who did not share their L1 reported using mostly English at home, but sometimes other languages with particular family members. One participant reported using her L1 with her brother at home, but not with her daughter. However, this consistent use of English can bring difficulties, and the partners varied in how supportive they were of the participant's language learning and efforts to practise. Lucia, a 34-year-old from Colombia, said near the beginning of the project that she felt that she in some way had a 'reduced personality', since she had to express herself through a language in which she was not fully proficient. She noticed that her partner spoke differently to her than to his friends and he had told her that he did not like to correct her language because he thought her mistakes were cute. Others spoke of their frustration in not being fully able to express their feelings in English, and of the difficulties caused when they could not understand something. Some found that their partners and their families made an effort to facilitate communication.

As noted above, children complicated issues of language use in the family. One participant says that it is easier for her to switch into English when her husband is with her and her children, simply because otherwise she would have to translate everything. Some English-speaking partners insisted only English be used in the

family. As a result, in some families the children no longer spoke their L1 as they grew in proficiency, while their mothers gained more slowly in their English-language competence and were no longer able to speak their L1 with their children. By the end of data collection, six participants reported that their children no longer spoke the L1 much. One participant reported that whenever she spoke to her son in Mandarin, he answered in English. Another, Anne, from the Philippines, reported that her husband asked her to use English at all times in the house so that his children from a previous relationship who do not share her L1 know what is going on, and she has become linguistically marginalised in the family as a result.

Anne, C06, CSWE III

Anne is a 27-year-old married female from the Philippines. She has been in Australia for a year but her husband has been here for 15 years. She has three older step-children and she and her husband have two children together. Her husband and children all speak English fluently and English is the main language spoken at home. Her husband discouraged her from using her L1 with the children, even though they did use some Tagalog at first. Her son, who used to speak to her using her L1, can no longer do so and has asked her to speak English with him, but the children appear to be critical of her use of English, telling her when she is wrong.

This is potentially a very distressing situation for a migrant, usually the mother, and ultimately for the family as a whole. If she is unable to gain full proficiency in English in the way that her children and the rest of the family have, then she may be unable to fully communicate with them, and they may even come to ridicule her attempts to use English, as reported by two of the participants. If her children do not even share the one language in which she is fully proficient, then she may become marginalised in the family. As Norton (2000) illustrates, as the children grow up and not only become fluent in English but also relate strongly to Australian cultural values, there is considerable potential for discord and a rupture in lines of communication in the family.

### 3.5 Use of English at work

As reported in the previous chapter, 49% (74) of the participants reported finding work at some time during the one-year data collection period. This section deals with the kinds of interactions they reported engaging in at work, and how these varied for different learner groups.

#### 3.5.1 Interactions in the workplaces and overall trends

Participants mentioned needing both specific work-related talk and social talk for work, and the former generally seemed to be less problematic for them than the latter. Issues relating to work talk included the need to acquire work-related vocabulary, which was often quite specialised and varied from workplace to workplace, as illustrated in the following vocabulary sets mentioned by participants:

- massage therapy-related vocabulary
- factory-related vocabulary
- technical vocabulary for a design company
- nicknames for cigarettes
- phrases for answering the telephone at work.

The demands of the different workplaces varied enormously, and while some participants said that they did not need to read or write at work at all, others reported the following specific reading and writing tasks required in their workplace:

- reading occupational health and safety manuals
- reading signage around work
- filling in timesheets
- reading policies and rules
- writing meal orders.

While many participants, particularly at CSWE I and II, anticipated that employment would help them to particularly develop their spoken skills in English language, their workplaces were diverse and this was not always the case. As discussed in Chapter 2, most were employed in lower-level jobs, and while for some, like Dan, who became a security guard, work provided the opportunity to improve their language skills, others, like Irene and Lily, noted that it primarily provided practice in routine, repetitive and formulaic expressions rather than the opportunity to engage in non-routine or extended interactions. While these restricted opportunities

helped to improve their confidence, they did not extend them beyond their comfort zone in ways that develop their language skills.

**Dan, C05, CSWE III, Q3**

Dan: So the job ga- gave me like confidence because I HAVE to speak with people I – I'm not like sitting at home or with my friend that understand my same language ...

R: Mhm.

Dan: So there's some situations that I have to speak. There's some situation that I have to talk to people. Some issues I have to do so – some problems some things. So my job help me like give – ga- gave me like the opportunity to – to be confident of myself. I – it – it didn't add anything to my language ...

R: Mhm ...

Dan: But it gave – it gave me like confidence.

Irene, C08, CSWE I

Irene worked in a laundry factory. Although she initially expected that she would be able to practise and improve her English at work, she found that all she needed to do to carry out the limited conversations required at work was to memorise work-related words.

Lily, C01, CSWE II

Lily worked at a bakery shop and also expected that she would be able to improve her English as she interacted with customers. However, she soon realised that her English did not improve at all, as most of the time she only got to practise very simple, formulaic phrases like 'Which bread?' and 'Here's your change'.

Lucia, C09, CSWE III

Lucia worked as a waitress in a cafe before joining a transport company as a ticket inspector. She found the cafe work very tiring and her interactions with customers very brief and repetitive, so it did not offer her much opportunity to extend her use of English. She commented that she felt like a robot. She was initially quite excited about her new job as a ticket inspector because it gave her much more opportunity to speak to people. However, she soon discovered disadvantages to an inspector's role and became disenchanted.

Participants often found social talk with customers, supervisor or colleagues difficult. One participant, Gilberto, called this 'chatting talk'. During Q3 and Q4 he worked as a kitchen hand in an aged care facility, where he felt he could not cope with this easily.

**Gilberto, C07, CSWE I, Q3**

R: Do you talk to your colleagues?

Gilberto: Yes ...

R: Yeah.

Gilberto: I need but sometimes many peoples a- aski me, how are you? Where you from? Do you like this jobi ah but, ah many peoples ask me more better, but I don't understand sometimes. Ah it depend, ah, have people, one people mm ... some peoples I understand, some peoples I don't understand, yeah, no. I don't understand, yeah.

Another illustration comes from CSWE I participant Li Ming, who worked as a cleaner and had run a milk bar. She said in Q2 that she could not always understand her customers when they chatted at work.

**Li Ming, C08, CSWE I, Q2**

Int: Okay yep yep. It it yeah I absolutely agree with you. Initially when I first started to talk to the customer I really don't know how to

R: Right. Hhhhmm. Hhhhmm.

Int: ask the questions, and then I ask my customer teach me.

R: Okay right. And were your customers good teachers?

Li Ming: Yeah good teacher. [continues in L1]

- Int: So every day accumulate a little.
- Li Ming: Every day yeah ...
- R: Okay. Did you also start to be able to have conversations with the customers about their family, about their life, you know, social conversations?
- Int: [L1 exchange]
- Int: Yeah sometimes they tell me but just that I don't understand.

In some cases talk was actively discouraged. For example, a participant who worked in a massage parlour was told explicitly not to talk to customers as they had come to relax rather than to chatter, and employees in the spectacles factory where Anna (see Chapter 2) worked had been explicitly told by their boss not to talk at work. Even where there was no such prohibition, some workplaces, such as a kitchen or a production line, were not conducive to talk. Some participants found jobs in workplaces run by migrants with the same L1, so that English was not required, and others found that interaction in any form was kept to a minimum. Many participants, particularly at lower CSWE levels, realised through their work experiences that the workplace was not going to provide the opportunities needed to improve their English. Some of them spoke of the need to study English formally again in school if they were to improve their job prospects.

Other participants found that workplaces did help to foster further English-language learning. CSWE II participants who were working and studying in the AMEP part-time in Perth (Centre 12) made particular mention of this. Tat, who worked in a local hardware store, found that her workplace in Perth allowed her to improve her English as she joked with her co-workers and answered customers' questions. Susan, who worked as beautician in a salon and then opened her own beauty business, found that regular contact with clients improved her English. Mary was able to practise her English in a takeaway food shop where she worked and Ann found it very helpful when her supervisor in the mushroom farm where she worked accommodated her level of English and spoke slowly.

Some participants, mostly at CSWE III, took active steps to create opportunities for increased interaction in English in their workplaces by seeking out English-speaking colleagues during breaks, deliberately changing their jobs in pursuit of more interactive workplaces, and volunteering in environments where they could use their skills and engage with others through English.

### 3.5.2 Comment on the relevance of the AMEP

Participants at CSWE I mentioned 'different vocational languages' as being helpful for use in the workplace, and there was a general feeling that an improvement in their English would lead to securing work. A couple of participants at this level explicitly requested topics relating to the workplace and how to network with professionals. Some CSWE II participants commented that lessons on 'résumé writing' and 'cover letters' were very helpful for them and they were interested in Australian workplaces.

However, as discussed in more detail in the next chapter, CSWE III participants were generally more articulate in outlining the topics they had found relevant in the AMEP and in drawing the connection between these topics and their interactions in the workplace. They mentioned topics they had covered across the macro skills that they had found useful for employment. In particular, one participant mentioned engaging in a 'job expo excursion' (Sherry, C02) and, as noted in Chapter 2, others found the 'Work It Out' program, which was part of their AMEP experience, very useful as these gave them information that was relevant to employment (such as Pita, Hong, Cho and Sirinan in C10).

The following lesson topics taken up in class were also mentioned as useful:

- reading
- job seeking
  - finding a job – job websites
  - addressing selection criteria
- writing
  - résumé and covering letter
  - job applications.

Other workplace-related topics covered in class that they found useful include the following.

- how to get a job in Australia
- English for hospitality and related professions
- classes to do with the workplace
- Australia's employment system
- how to communicate in the workplace
- getting to know the Australian workplace
- how to behave in the Australian workplace
- general mention of 'Work It Out' program.

Some of the topics that participants requested include the following:

- work experience programs
- adjusting to the workplace
- English for specific occupations other than medical
- English for medical purposes
- English for Nursing Council qualification exam.

### **3.6 Summary and implications**

The patterns of language use described in this chapter have illustrated the areas in which the participants used English in the community, in the family, socially and at work.

- Overall, the kinds of community interactions that participants engaged in were similar across all migrant groups and related to settlement issues and routines. As discussed in the following chapter, many of these seem to be catered for in the curriculum and delivery in the AMEP.
- As far as language use in the family is concerned, the analysis has highlighted some issues that may impact on settlement success in the longer term and which could be usefully addressed early in settlement. These include the role of partners and other family members in assisting in both the development of an migrant's English-language skills and the maintenance of their L1. Both of these areas are potentially crucial for their self-esteem and identity and thus their psychological wellbeing.
- Social English is a problematic area in which low-level learners are at a real disadvantage. Developing skills in the social domain is important at work, as well as outside. Starting and maintaining a social interaction, even if willing interlocutors can be found, is very challenging for any newcomer. For language learners, it is a major issue. As discussed further in Chapter 5, without the opportunity to participate in and therefore practise social interaction, significant gains in speaking skills are unlikely. The data show that many participants had quite limited exposure in this domain except with other learners, suggesting the importance of early intervention in not only the development of social language, but also the development of social networks. As discussed in the following chapters, the AMEP can play a crucial role in helping to develop and maintain social contact among newly arrived migrants.
- Language related to vocations and the workplace seems to be of more interest to learners at higher levels of CSWE as their confidence in English increases. However, while they expressed interest in a range of specific workplace language, it would seem more reasonable to focus on general rather than specialised workplace language.



## **Chapter 4**

# **Engagement with English in the AMEP**



# Chapter 4

## Engagement with English in the AMEP

This chapter addresses the research questions through an examination of data on how participants engaged with English in the AMEP. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 address the issue of progress in English-language learning and assessment in the AMEP. In Sections 4.3 and 4.4 participants' perceptions of their experiences in the program are discussed. Section 4.5 examines the implications of these findings for AMEP providers.

### 4.1 Perceptions of progress and the AMEP

Progress in language learning, especially by migrants who have arrived in an unfamiliar context, often after considerable upheaval, is a complex matter. This section considers how participants felt about their progress and the relevance of assessment in the AMEP.

The vast majority of participants were very positive about their progress in learning English and the role of the AMEP in assisting them to use English to conduct everyday transactions that they could not do previously. Progress was discussed in terms of increased ability in spoken English, greater independence, improved ability to understand Australian accents, less need to prepare before an interaction, and understanding more in movies and popular entertainment.

Elisabeth, C03, CSWE 1

When Elisabeth arrived in Bankstown, New South Wales, from Vietnam in June 2008 with her family, she had had very little prior English-language training despite having had 14 years of formal education. She spoke very little English and needed the help of interpreters for the Q1 interview. By Q2 she had started noticing that her English, particularly her speaking, was getting better, as she could now conduct everyday activities on her own. She was happy that she could bargain and ask for what she wanted specifically when shopping. She proudly talked of an occasion when she had gone out shopping and was able to protest that the produce that she was getting was 'a bit small'. She attributed this improvement to her time in the AMEP.

Other learners reported how they could now use English to speak in situations in the community, such as talking to their children's teachers, as in the case of Hogan, a 40-year-old male participant from China.

Hogan, C01, CSWE II

Hogan arrived in Parramatta, New South Wales, from China in February 2006 with his family. He had to put his three young children in day-care and schools as soon as he arrived in Australia, and was keen to understand more about his children's education and how they were going at school. In the first few years in Australia, he had not been as active as he would have liked because he felt he lacked the English proficiency to talk to his children's teachers. But after studying at CSWE II, he reported feeling able to participate in events such as parent-teacher meetings with relative ease, and being able to talk to other parents and teachers about his children's progress.

A significant number of participants (particularly at CSWE I level) attributed the progress they felt they had made to the fact that AMEP was the only place in their lives where they could speak and practise their English with other people. However, a number of participants reported that their use of English deteriorated following their departure from the AMEP, whether they were at home caring for infants, or even in some workplaces where they had less opportunity to practise and expand their English-language skills when they finished the AMEP. In leaving the AMEP they found that they had lost an important social network and opportunities to practise their English. Although strong L1 networks (for example, Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese) facilitated social relationships and helped participants meet their daily needs most of the time without the use of English, they also played a role in this disconnection (see Chapter 5). Many who did not already have or deliberately seek out speaking or listening practice in English were disconnected from an English-speaking environment both during and after their AMEP studies.

As far as perceptions of language-learning progress are concerned, there were no discernable patterns based on gender or CSWE levels, although, as discussed in Chapter 5, previous learning experiences seem to have influenced learning style and therefore the level participants achieved in particular skills.

## 4.2 Assessment in the AMEP

The competencies on which the CSWE curriculum is based consist of several sets of ‘can-do’ statements, which are further broken down into detailed description of the skills and knowledge that learners need in order to be able to perform them successfully and against which they are assessed (Brindley 2000). Assessment relates to the achievement of Learning Outcomes (LOs) of various competencies and can occur at various stages of a course, usually towards the end of a term. As the fifth edition of the *Certificates I–IV in Spoken and Written English* (NSW AMES 2008) was published in 2008, when data collection for the project took place, both the 2003 (NSW AMES 2003) and 2008 versions of CSWE learning outcomes were used for the assessment of the project participants.

The 2008 edition of the CSWE curriculum includes a larger number of LOs, which are specified in more detail than in the 2003 version. Table 4.1 compares the number of LOs in the 2008 and 2003 versions for each CSWE level.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 4.1: Comparison of learning outcomes in the 2003 and 2008 curriculum**

	Pre-CSWE*	CSWE I	CSWE II	CSWE III
<b>2008 version</b>	21	32	35	41
<b>2003 version</b>	8	14	26	32

\* The official title of this level is the ‘Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English’ in both versions.

Two types of data collected in the project relate to the LOs taken by the participants: samples of the assessment materials and of their performance, and the LOs recorded on the selection profile for each participant. Because of the nature of the outcomes measured and the assessment process, the achievement of LOs should not be seen as the only measure of language learning. Both teachers and clients can choose which LOs are attempted, and achievement may not be possible for a variety of reasons. For example, a client may arrive in the class just before the assessment without having had the related language instruction and practice, or they may be absent at the time of the assessment. Moreover, the timing, regularity and nature of assessments decided by a centre or a teacher may mean that particular groups or individuals undertake more or less assessment than others.

Analysis of the outcomes recorded as achieved in the AMEP shows that, while there were participants who achieved as many as 31 LOs, some had no LOs recorded as achieved, in some cases because their time in the AMEP had been very brief. On average, participants were recorded as having 12–13 LOs. To investigate if there were any trends for gender, age and education level on the number of LOs recorded as achieved, a quantitative analysis using non-parametric statistics for group comparisons was conducted on the entire sample (n = 152). No significant differences were found for any of these background variables. Given the nature of the curriculum and assessment, however, this is not surprising.

Since the curriculum is designed to provide a national framework for the delivery and assessment of a language program relevant to the settlement needs of a wide variety of clients, it is important for assessment tasks to have face validity for learners and address areas of relevance in this period of their lives. The longitudinal nature of the study allowed researchers to explore the interview data for insight into the usefulness of particular LOs at different CSWE levels. Researchers were able to relate the LOs for particular levels with comments made by participants at a later date on what kinds of activities they undertook in English and how their competence in different areas had changed over the course of the study. The results of this analysis are presented below, together with two brief cases for each CSWE level that illustrate participants’ successful use of the skills tackled in LOs at their level.

### 4.2.1 Pre-CSWE and CSWE I

The skills tackled in the following eight LOs were singled out for comment by participants at this level in Q1:

- C1B2 Completing a short form
- C1C1 Understanding a short spoken transaction
- C1C2 Participating in a short spoken transaction
- C1D1 Understanding a spoken information text

- C1D2 Understanding a written information text
- C1J1 Understanding a spoken recount
- C1F02 Reading a short information text
- C2LSB1 Understanding casual conversation.

The cases of Tina and James illustrate how they found the skills covered in C1B2: 'Completing a short form' useful. Of course, since language learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom, it is not possible to determine exactly how or where they actually mastered these skills.

Tina, C03, CSWE I

Tina was a female of 26 years of age from Vietnam. She was a nail artist and dressmaker in her country but was working as a factory worker in Q3 and Q4. By Q4 she said that she was able to fill in some forms by herself.

***Tina, C03, CSWE I, Q4***

- R: What type of stuff do you have to fill up at work?
- Tina: [L1 long exchange]
- Int: There are some employment form
- Tina: Yeah.
- Int: That I had to fill in.
- R: Okay, is that on a regular basis or just one off, do you have to do it often?
- Tina: No often.
- R: Not often.
- Int: Just one off.
- R: Oh, one at the beginning maybe, oh okay. Could you understand everything?
- Tina: I do think, yes I understand.
- R: You understood what you were writing?
- Tina: Yeah.
- R: You understand what they wanted, okay. So but did someone help you to fill it out or no?
- Tina: No.
- R: Oh, by yourself?
- Tina: Yeah, by yourself.

James, C11, pre-CSWE

James was 38 years of age from Burma. His father was a pastor at a Baptist church, and after nine years of schooling he worked on his family farm. At the age of 22, he fled from Burma to a large refugee camp in Thailand, where he spent 16 years before he and his family were granted entry to Australia. During his time in the camp, he attended a Bible college. By Q4 he was working in a poultry factory, where the skills covered in the AMEP curriculum were relevant.

***James, C11, pre-CSWE, Q4***

- R: So what can you do now that you couldn't do then?
- Int: [L1 exchange]
- James: [L1 exchange]
- Int: For uhm English lang–
- R: Yeah using English language.
- [....]

R: What kinds of forms do you have to fill in for work?  
 Int: [L1 exchange]  
 James: In the workplace? In the workplace?  
 R: In the workplace, yeah.  
 James: [L1 exchange]  
 Int: Well, all the application form and leave, leave form.  
 R: Leave form when  
 Int: Yeah.  
 R: you want to take a holiday?  
 Int: Yeah, yeah, holiday.  
 James: Yeah.  
 R: Oh, okay. Do you have to write?  
 Int: Sick leave, sick leave form.  
 R: Okay.  
 Int: Just only fill the form.  
 R: Okay and you can, no problem.

#### 4.2.2 CSWE II

The following four LOs were singled out for comment by participants at this level in Q1:

- C2A03 Negotiating a spoken transaction for goods/services
- C2F02 Participating in short interaction involving explanation
- C2G01 Reading an informal letter
- C2RWJ2 Writing an informal text.

The cases of Susan and Vinny illustrate how they found some of these useful.

Susan, C12, CSWE II

Susan is a female of 34 years of age from Thailand where she worked in various service roles, including as a housekeeper in a hotel. In Australia she works in a beauty shop for three days a week. In Q3 she said she was able to participate in interactions covered by the LO C2A03: 'Negotiating a spoken transaction for goods/services' (2003 curriculum).

#### *Susan, C12, CSWE II, Q3*

Susan: No next next week I can answer phone. Now I can oh c- help customer came I can say hello can I help you, but boss say can say hello can I help you love.  
 R: Right, okay. So, you can do and then you can fill in the book?  
 Susan: Yes.  
 R: So your English has got better in that respect?  
 Susan: Uhm yeah and more more better and ah for money too. Now I can take money.  
 R: Okay, from the customers?  
 Susan: Yeah in the machine for EFTPOS for people use card yeah?

Vinny, C01, CSWE II

Twenty-five-year-old Vinny is from India, where she worked as a teacher. In Australia she wanted to have a job related to customer relations or human resources. In Q4 she related an experience of a job interview in which she made use of skills covered in C2F02: 'Participating in short interaction involving explanation'.

### ***Vinny, C01, CSWE II, Q4***

Vinny: Ah I – I had recently in my interview with doctor ahm and I – I was very worried about ah how can I understand their – ah her – ah his slang because hm and he was ah very old. Ahm when I went there and hm when – and start my interview with him ah ahm he ask me six to – [knock on the door] six to ten questions. And he ask me seven to – six to seven questions and after finish my interview ah I got good feedback from him.

R: What was the interview for?

Vinny: Uhm admin. Admin work.

R: Okay. So do you know yet if you got the job?

Vinny: Actually ah it's ah hm two to three weeks waiting.

However, as might be expected, coverage of a competency does not necessarily imply mastery at all levels and on all occasions, and participants also mentioned difficulties they experienced in undertaking some of the functions covered in the curriculum, as the case of Ping illustrates.

Ping, C12, CSWE II

Ping is a female of 34 years of age from Thailand, where she worked as an instructor at a T-shirt design school. In Q1 she was in a pre-CSWE class in Perth. She worked at a restaurant and then later at a beauty salon. In Q4 she was working at a chicken butcher's, preparing food, and reported still needing the assistance of a co-worker in order to complete the ordering processes she needed to do for her job (C2A03: 'Negotiating a spoken transaction for goods/services').

### **4.2.3 CSWE III**

Comments about 15 LOs were identified in the excerpts from interviews with participants at CSWE III level in Q1:

- C3A02 Giving a short explanation
- C3A3 Capacity for independent learning
- C3B01 Reading a procedural text
- C3B02 Writing an informal letter
- C3LSB2 Participating in a casual conversation with topic changes
- C3B03 Writing a formal letter
- C3LSC1 Understanding a complex spoken exchange
- C3LSC2 Negotiating a complex spoken exchange
- C3D01 Understanding spoken instruction
- C3LSE1 Understanding a spoken information text
- C3LSE2 Delivering a short spoken presentation
- C3G02 Giving an oral presentation
- C3RSH1 Understanding a complex written text
- C3RSI2 Understanding news articles
- C3K01 Reading newspaper articles.

The two cases below illustrate how participants at this level have made use of these skills.

Nfumu, C10, CSWE III

Nfumu, 21 years of age, came from the Democratic Republic of Congo and had lived in Benin for several years before coming to Australia. In Q3 he talked about his experience on a radio show (C3LSE2: 'Delivering a short spoken presentation').

### *Nfumu, C10, CSWE III, Q3*

- Nfumu: Since last December, we had the opportunity to – to get a show – one hour show per week, on H radio. So in the association, people
- R: Yeah, good.
- Nfumu: Are a bit afraid to do it and [laughter] I saw that this an opportunity for me to develop my English also my skills to research on topics, and I volunteer. I say I'm I'm going to do it but you have to put someone with me because [laughter] I don't know how to do it by myself. So they put a journalist with me and every Saturday we're going there [laughter] from three o'clock to four.
- R: Fantastic.
- Nfumu: We're doing a show and that has improved my English really because, when I speak, the first time I speak or the first interview I did on H radio, yes it was good but not much.
- R: Brilliant.
- Nfumu: Yes. I passed – I – I did a – another interview on ABC which was also good but not sure but now, I can ... support the whole one hour show by myself.

Karen, C09, CSWE III

Karen (see case discussed in Chapter 2), 25 years of age, came from China, where she worked as a landscape designer. She got a job as a landscape designer and was working at a leading design firm in Q2. In Q2 she talked about reading texts related to her profession (C3RSH1: 'Understanding a complex written text').

### *Karen, C09, CSWE III, Q2*

- Karen: And I read some – some professional book.
- R: Right.
- Karen: Yeah.
- R: Yep and – and what are those professional books? ...What are they, technical or artistic?
- Karen: Some – some like something like urban design, landscape design, the garden and some newspaper. The Australian newspaper some home idea. Something like that.

## **4.3 What participants found useful**

In line with the findings of the National Client Satisfaction Survey (DIAC 2008), an overwhelming majority of the 152 participants across the different CSWE levels expressed great satisfaction with and gratitude for the AMEP. Participants appreciated being able to attend classes without paying fees and having access to related services that helped them learn English and settle in Australia. For example, Alex, a 35-year-old male participant from Saudi Arabia, expressed his surprise at the range of AMEP services available for migrants and refugees such as himself. In the quarterly interviews, Alex was often quite emotional when talking about how much the AMEP has helped not just his English but also his settlement process, including the career counselling he felt he needed, particularly when he wanted to look into options for joining the armed forces.

Generally, participants reported finding the opportunities for language learning and for learning about Australian culture and aspects of life in Australia very useful. Participants from higher CSWE levels, in particular, also reported liking learning about employment and workplace cultures in Australia, knowledge they felt that they would not have had the opportunity to learn otherwise. A number of participants also appreciated the

opportunity to develop new skills such as formal writing or computing skills that they found to be useful, especially for job seeking. The AMEP also provided many with the opportunity to meet other AMEP learners who became lasting friends, and it was evident that their participation in multicultural classrooms had helped them to learn about different cultures and cross-cultural interaction.

### 4.3.1 Topics

Participants commented positively, in particular, about learning in the following areas:

- Australian slang
- Australian accent (pronunciation)
- understanding other migrants' accents (and backgrounds)
- Australian culture and practices, history etc
- government and other services that were available
- pragmatics (eg how to talk to people, appropriate levels of formality)
- how to use computers, email etc
- small talk (appropriate topics for conversation), conversation skills
- advice on how to relate socially to Australians
- 'practical' everyday topics such as banking, taxes, business, paying bills, shopping
- writing letters
- academic skills such as presentations.

In the interviews participants were asked about their impressions and views of the AMEP, but they varied in the extent to which they were able to give detailed responses. Table 4.2 summarises some of the themes and topics that participants mentioned in their interviews as especially useful. The table shows the number of participants from each CSWE level who said that they found the particular topics to be useful, followed by the percentage figures in brackets.

**Table 4.2: Themes and topics participants found to be most useful in the AMEP**

Themes and topics	CSWE level		
	Pre-I (4 centres: 57 participants)	II (2 centres: 22 participants)	III (5 centres: 73 participants)
English for everyday purposes	23 (40%)	11 (50%)	7 (9.6%)
Australian English (eg slang, idioms)	1 (1.8%)	0	5 (7%)
Government services	0	1 (4.5%)	0
Australian culture and cultural practices (including citizenship)	25 (44%)	2 (9%)	24 (33%)
Specific topics that address particular occupational needs	0	1 (4.5%)	2 (3%)
Computing classes	1 (1.8%)	0	1 (1.3%)
Friends made through the AMEP	0	1 (4.5%)	7 (9.6%)
Post-AMEP studies	0	1 (4.5%)	1 (1.3%)
Workplace and working culture	2 (3.5%)	0	14 (19%)

As can be seen in Table 4.2, participants, particularly those from lower CSWE levels, found topics related to English for everyday purposes to be very useful. It is also clear that participants at all levels appreciated learning about Australian culture and cultural practices, which includes learning about social norms, Australian history, cultural heritage and multiculturalism. One noticeable trend is that participants at CSWE III level more often reported that learning about Australian workplaces and workplace culture was useful for their daily lives. These trends are discussed further below.

### 4.3.2 Language for everyday transactions

Comments by participants at lower CSWE levels clearly signalled their enthusiasm for topics related to everyday life, and although some still lacked confidence by Q4, particularly when speaking to Anglo-Australians on their own, by later stages of the data collection most felt the benefit of this early instruction and reported much greater mobility as their English-speaking abilities improved. They liked using English skills taught in class as they became able to do everyday tasks like shopping, making and changing appointments, and going to the bank, as reported by John.

#### *John, C07, CSWE I, Q4*

- R: And how about listening? You said you can –
- John: As –
- R: Make a phone call, you can listen?
- John: Yeah, when I'm –
- R: Yeah.
- John: Make appointment for the doctor and when I'm maybe make appointment in the – in the Centrelink.
- Int: Centrelink or –
- John: Or in
- Int: Yes, yes.
- R: Or in English?
- John: Does it –
- R: Or the doc – or the doctor?
- John: Yeah, with the doctor.
- R: Good.

This developing sense of independence was evident among female participants at lower CSWE levels who said that what they had learned helped them to undertake activities such as shopping independently without their husbands, as in the case of Nhung.

#### *Nhung, C01, CSWE II*

Nhung arrived from Vietnam in December 2007 and settled in Parramatta, New South Wales, with her Australian husband. Before she enrolled in the AMEP, Nhung did not feel confident enough to go out on her own and interact in English, which meant that she became heavily dependent on her husband when doing daily activities such as shopping. She also felt quite lonely and isolated because of her lack of mobility and independence. However, as her English got progressively better in the AMEP, she began developing the courage to go out on her own and do activities such as shopping without her husband. As she studied at CSWE II level, Nhung reported feeling much more confident about her English and having much greater independence in her daily life.

#### *Nhung, C01, CSWE II, Q1*

- R: Your English is improving. Yes.
- Nhung: Improving. Yeah. [laughter]
- R: More and more. Yeah. How do you feel now?
- Nhung: Ahh I think I feel good now.
- R: You feel good now. You think that you can speak English?
- Nhung: Yeah I can ahh buy something myself.
- R: Good for you. By your–
- Nhung: I can ahh go everywhere myself.
- R: Uhmhm

Nhung: By train. By ahh by train.  
 R: Uhmhm  
 Nhung: So I don't need husband beside me. [laughter]  
 R: Oh. That's good.  
 Nhung: I can alone.

This increased mobility and confidence gave participants more courage to tackle situations in English, which in turn heightened their awareness of the kinds of possibilities and options available to them in Australia. In many cases, the ability to communicate in English also decreased their sense of isolation, motivating them to learn more English (particularly spoken skills).

### 4.3.3 Australian culture and cultural practices

As indicated in Table 4.2, a large number of participants across all CSWE levels found the insights they gained on aspects of life in Australia from their AMEP teachers very useful. These included language-related aspects such as Australian English pronunciation and slang, and other aspects of life in Australia. Jude, for example, particularly liked learning about Australian slang, while Nfumu and Alina found class excursions to be useful in helping them orient to their new Australian environment, rules and regulations.

#### *Jude, C02, CSWE II, Q4*

Jude: They had a subject ahh one of the subject about slang words.  
 R: Oh, did they?  
 Jude: Aussie slang words.  
 R: Yeah yeah.  
 Jude: So I learned little bit there.  
 [...]  
 Jude: This is very important in Australia ... most of people using the Aus- Australian when they speak they are  
 R: Slang.  
 Jude: Slang.  
 R: The idiom, yeah.  
 Jude: Yep that's correct.

#### *Nfumu, C10, CSWE III, Q4*

R: Great mm-hm. Uhm, have you – have the classes helped you to settle into the Australian community?  
 Nfumu: Yes yes.  
 R: In what ways?  
 Nfumu: Yes with some informations.  
 R: Mm-hm mm-hm.  
 Nfumu: Mm on my four – my first four weeks at TAFE.  
 R: Yeah.  
 Nfumu: I was there to other building.  
 R: Okay.  
 Nfumu: So they – they went out with us showing us the city.  
 R: Yeah.

Nfumu: And things. So even here when I came they will present you some information.  
R: Yeah.  
Nfumu: That you really need.  
R: Okay.  
Nfumu: For your settlement.

***Alina, C10, CSWE III, Q2***

R: And like the excursion today was interesting.  
Alina: Yes of course.  
R: I mean – mm – hm.  
Alina: Because this kind of excursion ah – or my case because I join short courses, ah and I visit ah ... political system in Australia and um, um, um this – High Court of –  
R: Okay, that's a course about the system of government in Australia?  
Alina: Yes, yes.  
R: Okay.  
Alina: And we – we was visit it.  
R: Okay, right, that's good.  
Alina: So the more institution, like Aurora, and its good connection with the system here.  
R: Eah, okay.  
Alina: So we – we learn lots of thing about the – the country where we live.  
R: And that's important to know.  
Alina: It's very important.

The case of Marina illustrates the very concrete benefits for her family of coverage in her AMEP class of the Australian legal system.

Marina, C03, CSWE I

Marina arrived in Sydney from Lebanon in April 2008. Like many other participants, when she first arrived in Australia Marina had very little knowledge about Australian laws and the legal system and was worried about rules that she did not know about, such as Australian traffic laws. Through the AMEP, she learned about some of these, including basic information about how to deal with the police, and the legal procedures necessary to resolve civil matters such as traffic fines. This information proved to be handy when her husband lost his licence. With her knowledge, she was able to help her husband in his dealings with the police and the court, and even explain to them that she would be driving her husband to and from work because she had an international driver's licence. She attributed learning this valuable information to her classes in the AMEP.

A large number of participants noted that they felt that the AMEP was their primary or *only* source of information about Australian culture, government and society.

#### 4.3.4 Employment and the workplace

As can be seen in Table 4.2, participants (particularly at higher CSWE levels) reported liking topics related to the workplace, such as finding a job and writing résumés. Many participants were looking for or planning their pathways towards employment or improving on their current job (see Chapter 2). Participants, such as Bianca, therefore found learning about formal writing (such as how to write a CV or covering letter) particularly useful:

##### *Bianca, C02, CSWE III, Q2*

Bianca: Oh it's very useful helpful because actually like ah this term all what we did is very important you know. Like ah written making résumé you know. First time I was thinking, what's this? But it's like ah this covering letter you know how to give a talk all those things it was very difficult for me before but now I think it's very interesting and helpful you know yeah. Yeah.

Participants also mentioned that they found it useful to learn about appropriate language use in workplace situations with different types of people (eg bosses, customers, colleagues, casual conversations), as many felt they did not yet have the confidence to strike up conversations with Anglo-Australians in the workplace. A few participants commented on learning about important occupational health and safety information through their classes at AMEP.

They also mentioned how they had benefited from topics related to the Australian workplace, as in the cases of Chloe and Sirinan.

##### *Chloe, C06, CSWE III, Q3*

R: All right then. And so do you think that your time in the – in the AMEP was a valuable experience for you?

Chloe: Yes I think so. If I didn't really have ah like the AMEP course I think I wouldn't even think about the looking for a job outside.

R: Right.

Chloe: Yeah.

R: Yes, so it got to you to that point.

Chloe: Yeah.

R: That's very good.

Chloe: Yes and feel more confident yeah.

##### *Sirinan, C10, CSWE III, Q3*

Sirinan: More – and like um right now they have work experience. Um that – that thing have um, so, that – that one – one thing very, very good for experience

R: Okay. Yeah did – you did work experience?

Sirinan: I did, yeah.

R: Where did you do it?

Sirinan: Like when or where?

R: Where?

Sirinan: Where? Or sorry – at a post, sorting centre, yeah.

R: Okay, right.

Sirinan: The, post I was there

R: And was that good?

Sirinan: It was good, yeah because in the – um it's very, um in the Australian and, you learn – ah I mean, I learn a lot about, how they work, how they – how they, mm behaving in the workplace – mm for yeah

R: Yeah, okay. Yeah, good.

Sirinan: [laughter] Yeah.

### 4.3.5 Making lasting friendships

In addition to the English they learned, many participants said that one of the most valuable aspects of their AMEP experience was meeting new and lasting friends. Due to their limited English, many participants, especially those at lower CSWE levels, did not have the chance to meet people outside their immediate L1 networks. As the interview excerpts from Rose and Alex illustrate, having new friends from various cultures and backgrounds has helped them to have a positive experience of multicultural Australia.

#### *Rose, C06, CSWE III, Q3*

- R: And, so in general, then, you, is there anything in addition to language that you gained from the AMEP?
- Rose: Yeah, uhm I've got new friends from different cultures. I've, I have no experience about the Australian cultures if I stay at home I will – I will never never get any information about
- R: Right.
- Rose: Australians culture.
- R: Good good.

#### *Alex, C09, CSWE III, Q3*

- Alex: Yeah, sure. Ahm, I found people from ev– everywhere people from Japan, ahm Italy, France, Israel, anywhere in the world so, all of them are very nice and and how – how is the, the precious feeling when you get all these cultures around you, you can hear from him and from her so –
- R: Yeah.
- Alex: After all that you – you feel like you are very rich of more culture round you, gives you –
- R: Okay, yeah.
- Alex: Yeah.
- R: So the, one of the important things is all of the people you're mixing with in – in that setting? In the class setting, all the different – all the different nationalities and cultures?
- Alex: Yeah, like they all, but them they, overall they gave me the – the feeling of it's really important. So, all – all people from everywhere, they came here to join the each other and to look forward for the future and for ahm – for happy and prosperous future for this country. Everyone have to give his – his best to – to get that aim.

These contacts were important on a number of levels. First, they gave participants a peer group whose members were experiencing some of the same life changes associated with leaving one country behind and learning to live in another, with all the associated upheavals and challenges. Because these new friends were also English-language learners, they provided a less threatening source of English-language practice than native speakers. They were also often a useful source of information and useful contacts. As discussed elsewhere, it was difficult for most participants to speak at any length with native speakers of English. Even those whose partners were native speakers and who therefore had potentially a ready-made network of English native-speaking friends found that the social engagements they had at the AMEP were an invaluable source of friendship and language practice, as they often felt left out and could not keep up with the conversations around them and so felt disheartened and friendless.

Other LOs from the AMEP that participants valued included computer and internet skills, including learning about useful websites. Some, like Tomoko, appreciated being able to learn about and discuss current affairs.

### *Tomoko, C10, CSWE III, Q3*

- R: Yeah, okay. Um so what ways have your English classes, your AMEP classes, helped you to settle into Australia?
- Tomoko: Um – It’s helpful for me because um I could understand the – about the culture and history and then what happen, in Australia just now because the teachers use newspaper and magazine, from recently
- R: Okay.
- Tomoko: But ah if we – we watch TV or trying to read newspaper, sometimes we can’t understand one hundred per cent, but if, ah we, we can use the um topics in classroom, we can understand more and more, so –
- R: Yeah, okay.

## **4.4 Developing literacy**

In this section we take a closer look at issues related to the development of participants’ reading and writing skills (literacy).

### **4.4.1 Educational background and learning experiences**

Research in second-language learning suggests that years of education are a predictor of achievement of literacy in English (Ross 1998; Kim 2009). Learners with a minimum of five years of education are deemed to have basic literacy in their language and therefore to be familiar with the roles and functions of literacy in their communities and in learning. This means that they are likely to be able to transfer an understanding of the literacies they have used in general education to their English-language learning. They may be familiar with literacy-based learning activities, such as identifying information in written texts; writing lists to classify and categorise information; using written sources to locate information; and using dictionaries, thesauruses and guides to language use. In comparison, those whose primary language does not have a written form, who are not literate in their first language or are highly literate in languages that do not use the Roman alphabet may find the development of English literacy more challenging. Typical learner profiles and successful approaches to literacy instruction for these learners have been well documented in AMEP research (Hood 1990; Nichols and Sangster 1996; McPherson 1997, 2008; Trevino and Davids 2001; Kim 2009).

As reported in Chapter 1, the participants in this project at all CSWE levels had relatively high rates of education. This was the case even in the pre-CSWE level, where six of the 12 participants had 8–12 years of education, three had less than seven years, and only two had less than three years.

Lisa, C11, pre-CSWE

Lisa is a 33-year-old female with small children who is from China. She has had 15 years of schooling, including three at tertiary level, in which she studied English as a foreign language.

At the beginning of the project, Lisa was in a pre-CSWE class, although she believed her reading skills to be better than her listening skills. By the end of the project she was in CSWE II level and had achieved 13 LOs for speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Clearly, she did not fit the usual profile for a learner at pre-CSWE level, as she entered the program with English literacy skills.

### *Lisa, C11, pre-CSWE, Q3*

- Lisa: Yes. But I can see I see I understand very but speaking I no understand.
- R: You don’t understand so if it’s written you can read it.
- Lisa: Yes.
- R: Is your reading good?
- Lisa: Yeah.
- R: Okay. And you understand but sometimes.
- Lisa: Yes because I my son my son’s childcare ahh sometimes [L1 exchange]
- Int: Letter, make letter yes.
- Lisa: I can see understand.
- R: You understand the letters you get from childcare, yeah.

#### 4.4.2 Beliefs about current English literacy skills

Interviews with participants were examined for their beliefs about their current English literacy skills and their perception of further literacy development needs. When talking about their literacy skills, participants mentioned the reading and writing that they were able to do outside the class, the literacy-based tasks they used for language learning inside and outside class, and any specific difficulties they encountered with their reading and writing.

When asked about language use outside class, the participants mentioned a range of literacy encounters, and these are summarised in Table 4.3 and organised according to whether they related to prose or other printed or electronic texts.

**Table 4.3: Forms of literacy encountered by project participants**

Documents	Forms (variety of contexts)
	Financial contracts and applications
	Insurance/business/legal documents
	Utility invoices and accounts
	Bank statements
	Medical/ethical clearance
	Taxation, superannuation etc
Prose	Literary texts, novels
	Children's books
	Non-fiction
	Autobiographies
	Religious texts
	Professional books
	Transactional letters
Websites	Baby care information
	Professional interest
	Job advertisements and applications
	Health information
	Trading
	Banking, financial
	Newspaper sites (global)
Digital communication	Email
	Chat
	Social networking
	Blogs
	Workplace data entry
	Financial transaction

Comparison with AMEP curriculum documents (NSW AMES 2008) reveals that these text types are readily represented in AMEP programs, as shown in Table 4.4. Thus, for example, they include form-filling, reading and writing narratives, reading and writing print, and digital information texts and communications. However, the varied formats, purposes and lexis used in these text types in different contexts represented a challenge for learners. For example, while general information, such as personal identification and personal histories, is a feature of forms in a variety of contexts, some learners who reported having mastered the vocabulary and formats of Centrelink forms found that forms in other contexts were designed differently and used different language.

**Table 4.4: Text types in the AMEP curriculum**

Text type	Learning outcomes			
	Pre-CSWE	CSWE I	CSWE II	CSWE III
Write formal letters				L1, Q2
Read/write reports			L1, L2	M1, M2
Complete formatted texts	F2	B2	H1	H1, H2, L2, Q1
Read/write narratives		L1	K1	K2, N1, N2
Read newspaper articles		D2		I1, I2, I3, J1
Read/write informal texts			J1, J2	
Read/write recounts		K2	H2, K2	
Read/write procedural texts	A1	I2	I2	H2

Note: Numbers and letters refer to particular learning outcomes in the curriculum.  
Source: NSW AMES 2008.

There seemed to be little general awareness among participants of the specific literacy skills that might be needed for particular domains of life. Some participants reported that their classroom learning focused on the literacy practices and texts required for job seeking (for example, reading job vacancy websites and newspaper adverts, filling in forms, and writing job applications and résumés). Fewer participants explicitly mentioned a need to learn the specific literacy skills of their current or future workplaces or vocational training. Similarly, while a small number reported receiving written texts from government or community agencies or groups, they did not report a need to learn how to read and respond to such communications. When asked how they dealt with these communications, the most frequent response was that they asked a friend or relative to interpret the communication and suggest an appropriate response; while others said they simply ignored the communication. One participant reflected that he may have missed a lot of important medical appointments because he was unaware of the need to respond to such letters.

### 4.4.3 Literacy development

As shown in the summary below, some participants specifically commented on the gains they had made in literacy and attributed these to their AMEP classes. Overall, they felt that as their social literacy skills improved, they were able to participate more independently in the community and to be less reliant on family and friends. The following examples were cited by participants at all levels to demonstrate their perceived improvement in social literacy skills.

Literacy skill	No. of participants who commented
Can independently complete familiar forms that request personal identification, eg at Centrelink, at hospital and medical clinics, for job applications.	6
Can independently complete forms requesting personal history, eg study course applications, employment history, résumés and CVs.	9
Can identify essential information in household accounts, eg payment date, amount due, contact telephone numbers.	1

*Cont ...*

... Cont

Literacy skill	No. of participants who commented
Can extract meaning from short (one to two paragraphs) written newspaper articles on familiar topics.	8
Can write and read short emails, postcards or messages to friends and families on familiar topics.	7
Can conduct internet searches for information.	3
Can locate information on websites.	3
Can conduct financial transactions on the internet.	1

Some participants explicitly reported improvements in their academic literacy as a result of their AMEP classes, and several felt that these were transferable to other learning contexts, such as vocational training and tertiary education. The academic literacies most reported were:

- researching information on the internet or printed texts
- reading and interpreting information in graphs and charts
- reports
- narratives
- descriptions.

The participants reported using various strategies when faced with complex written texts, including calling on family or friends to assist, attempting to read the texts with the use of a dictionary before seeking assistance, and visiting the authoring agency with an interpreter for an explanation. Beginner learners were more likely to ask others to explain and respond to written texts on their behalf. None reported any discomfort with this arrangement. Learners at CSWE II and III levels were more likely to attempt to comprehend texts with the use of dictionaries or other aids, but also sought assistance where necessary.

As far as assessment results in literacy outcomes are concerned, no patterns of difference were evident at any CSWE level for learners who had learned English prior to arrival in Australia and those who had not. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, the rate and timing of assessments seems to be largely in the hands of teachers rather than learners. Students who are ready to undertake assessments at any point in time may have to wait until the whole class is ready, so their demonstrated rate of achievement may be slower than their actual capacity.

A noticeable feature of literacy assessment tasks for the AMEP CSWE curriculum is that they are largely 'pedagogical' in nature. That is, they are designed for language-learning purposes and to measure skills learned in the classroom (NSW AMES 2008). This means that the format and content of assessment tasks may be some distance from real literacy texts that learners encounter in daily life. There has long been a debate about the use of 'real' and 'authentic' texts versus pedagogical texts in literacy instruction, and without reopening these arguments, there would seem to be a case for including more realistic pedagogical texts in the AMEP syllabus.

## 4.5 Criticisms and suggestions for improvement

Although participants were generally very positive about the usefulness of their AMEP studies, a few also had some suggestions and criticisms. However, these negative comments were very few in number and related mostly to class scheduling issues, services and facilities in the AMEP, the variety of learner competencies in classes, and the relevance of themes discussed in the program. Most critical comments about the AMEP related to the inflexibility of class schedules or the unavailability of specialised classes in their centres (eg English for medical or hospitality professions). Inflexibility of scheduling was an issue for some participants who wanted more part-time or evening classes, or had difficulty finding classes that met their work or family commitments. Others found the wide range of learning needs in their classes a problem, and noted that as a result their particular needs were not always met, as shown in comments by Nfumu.

### *Nfumu, C10, CSWE III, Q4*

- Nfumu: I think the environment has to be also flexible, according to the student needs.
- R: Yes.
- Nfumu: Because if – a 65-year-old man
- R: Yeah.
- Nfumu: Is studying, this man doesn't need to know how to write.
- R: Yeah, yeah.
- Nfumu: It's not important for him.
- R: Yes, okay.
- Nfumu: But if maybe they put – if there is a woman ah for example they put her in a flexible environment
- R: Yes.
- Nfumu: Where she can be learning English
- R: Yes.
- Nfumu: To help. Ah – also the students, the younger one when they come ... I think the English class has to – to know where they fit, yes to know where they fit in order to help them.
- R: Yeah, yeah.

There were also some complaints about classes where participants could not understand what or why something was being done. Some participants complained about different teaching styles when they changed classes. However, at the same time they often also blamed their own listening skills or laziness if they found the class too fast. Some also mentioned that they wanted more information on various areas of settlement that they were not learning in their particular classes (although they were in others), such as legal rights or interactions in a medical setting and at the bank.

Participants from lower CSWE levels were much less articulate in expressing what they liked and disliked, even though interpreters were used during quarterly interviews. This could be for a number of reasons to do with their low levels of English, the length of time they had spent in the AMEP and sometimes their relative lack of experience in educational settings, as in the case of Gilberto.

#### *Gilberto, C07, CSWE I*

Gilberto arrived in Australia from Brazil in April 2008 with a relatively low level of English proficiency. In the quarterly interviews, Gilberto said that he liked AMEP classes very much, although when asked which aspects of the AMEP he liked, he could not elaborate. In his Q4 interview, however, he was able to articulate some suggestions for the AMEP. He wanted more materials related to the Australian workplace and workplace culture. Although he was still unable to elaborate further (eg what kind of workplace or workplace materials), he was now able to use his improved English-language skills and longer experience in the AMEP to begin to address this question.

As an overall trend, CSWE I and II participants spoke more often about how the AMEP helped them to develop the proficiency they needed to conduct basic everyday transactions. Many of the women spoke of how they had gained the self-confidence they needed to undertake everyday activities without their husbands.

CSWE III participants as a whole made much more specific comments, both positive and negative. CSWE III participants, such as Sirinan, talked about how the AMEP had helped them to understand things such as Australian culture and the social contexts of everyday language use.

#### *Sirinan, C10, CSWE III*

Sirinan arrived in Hobart, Tasmania, from Thailand in June 2005. At CSWE III level, Sirinan's English was already quite fluent and he was able to read, write and converse in English without problems. Having been in the AMEP on and off for a few years, Sirinan said in interviews that he really appreciated having the AMEP to help him improve his English to the level where he can understand social contexts and Australian current affairs. Towards the end of the data collection period in Q3 and Q4, he commented that he wanted to learn more about Australian culture and cultural practices in the AMEP, and about resources available to migrants so that they would not feel like 'they are alone'.

Sirinan's case illustrates how participants at CSWE III were interested in learning about cultural aspects of Australian life, such as about the workplace or the legal system. They were more likely to want English directed to their particular vocational pathways, such as English for medical purposes or hospitality. More CSWE III students were interested in finding out about professions and pathways into them, and spoke positively about work experience courses.

There was little difference in comments from female and male participants, except that, proportionally, more male participants spoke of classes clashing with work commitments. For example, Alex from Saudi Arabia and Charles from Colombia, both in their late thirties and working full-time as single income earners in their families, reported that, although they liked learning in the AMEP, they often could not attend classes (particularly day classes) because of work commitments. Even weekend classes were often difficult because they had family commitments or second jobs. Men like Alex and Charles would like to have had more flexible class schedules that could accommodate their busy work schedules. On the other hand, female participants, such as Sally, a 33-year-old mother of two small children, often could not attend AMEP classes because they had to look after their children at home.

Sally, C09, CSWE III

Sally arrived in Melbourne in August 2008 with her husband and toddler son, and quickly settled in a new housing development in Melbourne's outer western suburbs. Although she still managed to attend her AMEP classes in the city for a few months, Sally decided to take some time off when her second pregnancy approached full term. After her daughter was born in Q3, Sally concentrated on tending to her baby and young son, and was unable to travel to the city to attend AMEP classes. Although the local provider had a campus in a nearby suburb, it did not offer night classes, so she could not attend class. She considered completing her AMEP entitlements by distance education, but her busy activities at home made it difficult for her to make the time commitment. She hopes that as her children grow up, she can go back to her AMEP classes. In the meantime, she was starting her own marketing business from home to try to earn some extra income.

There were some differences for participants from different age groups. Younger participants (16–34) more often reported that they liked learning about Australia and wanted to find out about workplaces and social situations. An example of such a case is Lila, a 24-year-old female from Colombia, who now works as an office administrative assistant in Melbourne.

Lila, C09, CSWE III

Upon marrying her Australian-Colombian husband, Lila migrated to Melbourne in February 2008. Lila appeared to be quite shy and timid at first, saying that she did not feel very happy at her previous workplace in Australia (as a biochemistry factory worker), and that she was frustrated at her lack of ability to cope with social situations in English. However, in later quarters, Lila appeared happier because she had found some new friends at work and this gave her more confidence to converse in English. As her confidence grew, Lila became more eager to learn about Australian cultural practices such as slang, idioms and social customs. At the end of data collection period, she reported feeling much happier, as she was beginning to understand Australian jokes and social contexts better.

The case of Zahra highlights the importance of youth-specific courses, as younger learners tend to gain proficiency in speaking faster than older learners. These courses are therefore able to cater for their individual learning needs more successfully.

Zahra, C08, CSWE I

Zahra came to Australia from Iran in December 2007. Her rate of progress increased noticeably once she was moved to a youth-specific English course. The 18-year-old had been in a class with older learners and was making progress, but when she was moved into a youth-specific course in Q3, her progress in spoken English accelerated noticeably.

More mature learners sometimes showed a little less interest in workplaces and were more interested in language for everyday life and family situations. This is particularly so in lower CSWE levels, as in the case of Marcia, a 52-year-old female participant from Sri Lanka who was living in Bankstown, New South Wales, with her family. Because Marcia was a housewife, she was not as interested in learning about language for the workplace or for social situations as she was in learning English for everyday transactions such as shopping and interacting with her children's teachers. Participants from the older age groups also commented about clashes with AMEP attendance and family responsibilities.

As far as language and cultural background is concerned, it was noticeable that many Mandarin-speaking participants showed the tendency to blame themselves when they spoke of a learning problem, and to attribute the progress they made to their AMEP classes, as well as to the self-study they do at home. They were also more likely to complain of limited progress with their English – especially their speaking – and

to attribute this to not working hard enough. (See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the likely influence of prior learning experiences and the strength of L1 networks.)

The language-learning tasks that participants (and their teachers) reported for many Mandarin speakers (homework, regular reference to written material, aversion to risk-taking, perfectionism etc), and the fact that this trend was evident in a range of educated participants with Chinese backgrounds, suggests that this issue relates to assumptions about how languages are learned that may not be helpful in this context.

## 4.6 Summary and implications

This chapter has examined the following findings on how participants engaged with English in the AMEP:

- The high rate of positive comments and low rate of negative comments about participants' experiences in the AMEP suggests that overall satisfaction with the program was very high.
- Positive comments related broadly to the feeling that the AMEP assisted participants to progress in English, learn about life in Australia and develop many of the skills that they needed for settlement. Generally, there seems to be a good level of fit between learner needs and the topics provided in the AMEP.
- Negative comments tended to be about particular aspects of participants' experiences, such as the scheduling of classes, rather than the content or scope of the program. This suggests that every effort should be made to deliver programs as flexibly as possible (ie a mixture of daytime and evening classes) to accommodate the needs of learners with different commitments.
- Participants at lower CSWE levels (pre-CSWE and CSWE I) found that topics to do with conducting basic everyday transactions were most useful, while participants from higher CSWE levels (levels II, III) seem to find more advanced and complex topics (such as conducting complex spoken negotiations, topics to do with finding professional employment etc) more valuable. This suggests that daily life topics seem to be particularly relevant at early CSWE levels, while a stronger workplace/pathways focus might be appropriate at CSWE III.
- While the curriculum covers areas of relevance to the development of literacy in English, a greater focus on authentic literacy tasks would be useful.

### Notes

- 3 Although the CSWE curriculum include the CSWE IV level, none of the participants in the current project were at this level at any point during the project, so this level is not considered in this report.



# Chapter 5

## Language learning, speaking skills and the role of the AMEP



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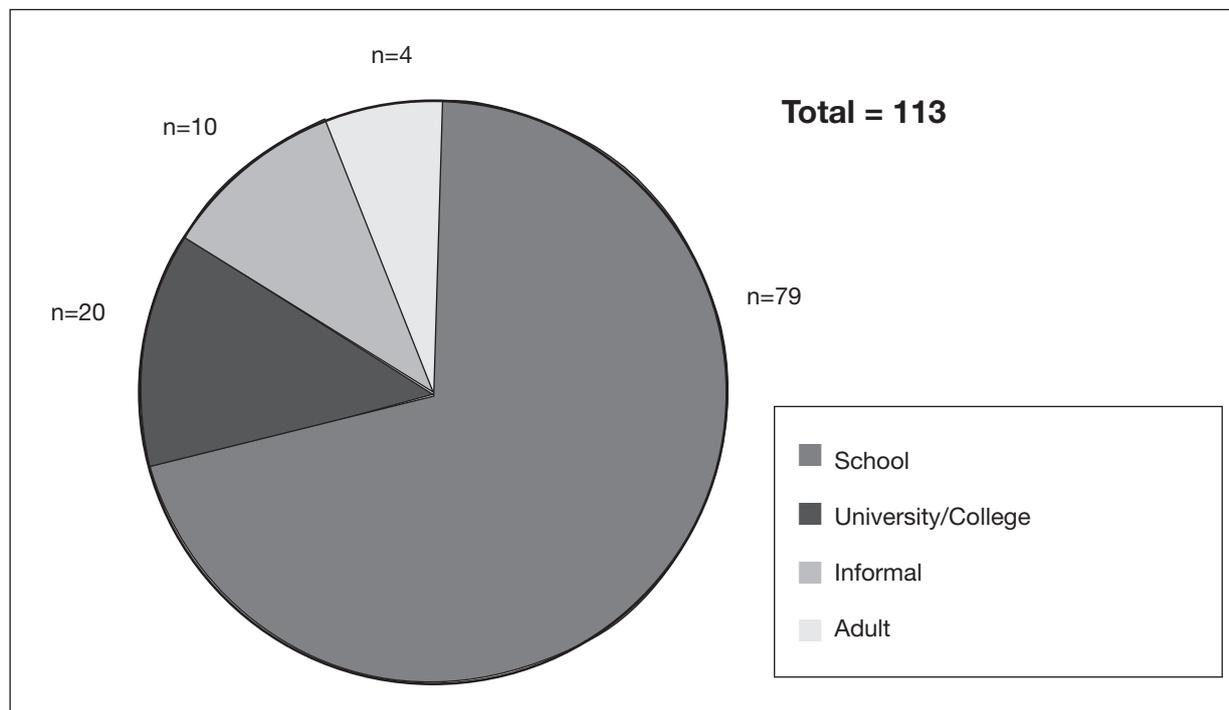
This chapter addresses research questions by looking at how participants' experiences and factors outside the classroom contribute to their language learning, and the relationship of these to the role of the AMEP.

### 5.1 Approaches to learning English

The way in which an individual approaches learning a language can have an important impact on their progress, and this is often greatly influenced by their prior educational and English-language learning experiences. Most of the participants in the study had at least secondary school education and most had also studied English in some form. Of 152 participants interviewed at the beginning of the study, 113 (75%) reported that they had learned English through formal schooling or independent/informal study prior to their arrival in Australia. For the majority, English was a compulsory subject. A small number had all of their education through the medium of English, so that written texts and assignments were in English in all subjects, with explanation and translation provided in their first language. However, the variety of English used would not have been Australian and, as spoken instruction was primarily provided through their first language, some participants reported very little experience with spoken English.

Figure 5.1 shows the educational setting in which the 113 participants who learned English before coming to Australia had studied. Raw numbers (in bold) and percentages are given. As shown in this figure, 79 (69%) learned English as a school curriculum subject, 20 (18%) studied English at tertiary level, 10.9% learned English informally or independently without formal instruction, and 4.4% learned through formal adult education.

**Figure 5.1: Educational setting of prior English-language learning**



Although it might be expected that prior language-learning experiences would be helpful for learning English after arriving in Australia, there were some disadvantages. While some participants had experience of using English in communication, for many participants English had been a subject they had learned formally at school in order to pass written exams with a focus on grammatical rules, memorisation and repetition rather than communication. Once in Australia they found it difficult to apply in their daily lives what they had learned overseas. They often found they lacked the listening and speaking skills they needed. This often led to feelings of frustration and a strong desire for the AMEP to compensate for the proficiencies they lacked. The case of 27-year-old Sari illustrates this point.

Sari, C02, CSWE III

Sari, whose first language is Urdu, arrived in Australia from Pakistan in September 2007 with her husband. They settled in Blacktown, New South Wales, and attended AMEP classes. In Pakistan, Sari had been a registered nurse with 14 years of formal education, including English-language classes at primary and secondary level. These had focused predominantly on reading, writing, memorisation and repetition, without much emphasis on speaking or listening. Sari had expected to do well in reading and writing, and had thought that she would at least be able to converse in English with relative fluency as soon as she arrived in Australia. However, she discovered, to her surprise, that her English-speaking and listening skills were not as good as she had anticipated. She had problems understanding Australian English pronunciation and found that English speakers found her hard to understand. In her Q2 interview, she attributed this lack of oracy skills to the fact that she did not practise her listening or speaking very much in Pakistan. Sari looked to the AMEP to help her improve in these areas so that she can register as a nurse in Australia.

Some participants who had learned another variety of English felt frustrated by the difficulty they experienced understanding the colloquial Australian English, which restricted their ability to listen and speak. The 34-year-old migrant from India in the excerpt below had difficulty understanding that different varieties of English (that is, different versions of English spoken around the world) had different characteristics.

*Sanjay, C02, CSWE III, Q1*

R: And – and the English that we speak in Australia –

Sanjay: Yeah.

R: Is different to India

Sanjay: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

Sanjay: India got mor– ahm they speak very ah like a –

R: British.

Sanjay: Ah British English.

R: Hm hm.

Sanjay: This use whole proper grammar and all that speak properly yeah they don't speak broken.

R: Hm.

Sanjay: Yes so they a little difficult that one.

R: That's because we came from convicts. [laughter]

Sanjay: That's right. [laughter]

[...]

Sanjay: Now I mean – I like it – it's easy it's ah ah I like this English it's very good.

A few of the participants who had studied English overseas had some difficulty adjusting to Australian English.

A noticeable trend was the tendency for participants to use the language-learning strategies with which they were most familiar when approaching the learning of English and doing individual study or homework. For instance, participants who were used to practising their English by completing homework worksheets or writing down sentences (for example, educated learners from Mandarin and Korean backgrounds) often felt that these were the most effective strategies for learning English, although they often found that they made little progress in those areas of English they most wanted to improve because they were only improving skills that they already felt comfortable with. This is perhaps why researchers observed that learners often identified the same weaknesses in their English at the beginning of the data and at later stages of data collection. This point is illustrated by the case of Hua, a 34-year-old participant from China, who practised her English by focusing on reading and writing, although she most needed to improve her spoken skills.

Hua, C08, CSWE I

Hua arrived in Melbourne with her husband in 2007 from China, where she had worked as an accountant. She had a total of 12 years of formal education, including some English classes at primary and secondary

levels, in which she studied by copying texts, reading, and memorising words and sentences. Because of this, her reading and writing in English were much better than her speaking and listening. She recognised this discrepancy from the moment she arrived in Australia and enrolled in the AMEP. However, although she wanted to improve her listening and speaking throughout the data collection period, Hua did not have a large English-speaking network and hardly practised her speaking and listening outside of class. At home, she largely practised her writing and reading skills by doing worksheet exercises. She felt that her oracy skills were not improving fast enough, while her writing and reading were steadily getting better.

In the interviews, participants shared their experiences of trying to practise their spoken skills. While some of these were helpful, such as 'listening to people's conversations', others were more formulaic and involved reciting words, memorisation and repetition of written language, often without real knowledge of or attention to pronunciation. Such activities are not usually interactive, and participants often complained that no matter how hard they practised outside class, they still found that native English speakers could not understand them. Some said they practised common sentences to prepare for using them in public, but faltered when the person they were speaking to did not respond with the phrases they expected to hear.

There seemed to be a tendency among a sub-set of learners to focus on the written language, even though they were particularly keen to develop their speaking skills. Many of these were from China, where approaches to education based on Confucian ideals may have emphasised rote learning, grammar and a focus on the written text (Cortazzi and Jin 1996; Yates 2003). They had difficulty recognising the sounds of spoken English, and, when they did, they were disconcerted by the way that spoken language does not always match their expectations of well-formed grammatical language. They were particularly reluctant to speak, fearful of making errors and of not being understood.

Such learners had little concept of how to improve their oracy, and tended to resort to the familiar techniques that emphasise writing, memorisation and repetition. They reported a heavy reliance on dictionaries (including pocket-size electronic ones) that they carried everywhere. New words would be memorised, and this memorisation formed the basis of their view of progress.

When the English-language situations they encountered in their daily lives did not match their expectations, they tended to blame themselves and resolved to work harder (eg do more homework and worksheet exercises), although they tended to do more of the same activities rather than change their approach to learning. Leo is an example.

*Leo, C02, CSWE I, Q1*

- R: I think you learnt English in China?
- Int: [long L1 exchange] Yes. Since primary four.
- R: Okay?
- Int: In China.
- R: Okay, so can you tell me about learning English at school in China?
- Int: Hm.
- R: What you did and what you learnt?
- Int: [L1 exchange]
- Leo: Ah yes. [long L1 exchange]
- Int: Okay, now in China! Is actually when we learn English. We were told? To memorise hard to learn the spelling?
- R: Uhmhm.
- Int: Say like in one week I have to learn 50 words.
- R: Right.
- Int: [laughter] I've got to memorise 50 words and then spell a lot.
- R: Aha. Uhmhm.
- [...]
- R: Uhmhm? And did you practise speaking, mainly speaking? Or mainly reading and writing and s- learning English at school.

Int: [long L1 exchange] We mem– we emphasis on reading and writing?  
 R: Uhmhm? Uhmhm?  
 Int: To memorise uhm spelling?  
 R: Yes.  
 Int: But not in conversation.  
 R: Okay.  
 Leo: [L1 exchange]  
 Int: Hm. And that's why if – because we don't use.  
 R: Hm. Hm.  
 Int: After that. So we just forget.

On the difficulty of constructing sentences and memorising vocabulary:

*Leo, C02, CSWE I, Q1*

Int: Okay. Actually I speak ahh very slowly. Uhm the reason for me to speak slowly is is that I'm afraid that people will not understand me.  
 R: Hhhmm. And when you speak slowly do people understand?  
 Leo: [L1 exchange]  
 Int: Well generally they can understand me although I have some defects in ahh grammar and I mean the order of the words and places but they can un– understand me in generally speaking.  
 Leo: [speaks in L1] I go to city. [speaks in L1]  
 Int: Hhhmm. Okay I notice that I my major prob– my major problem in speaking is that because I I don't know how to like link up as a some words to so that they can be a structured ahh sentence such as I go to city. Sometimes I forget how I can like connect this words so that it can be a complete sentence.  
 Leo: [speaks in L1]  
 Int: I understand that I need to try harder in learning English but I will appreciate I will appreciate if you could help me with the connection of different words and vocabulary. Ahm I think learning vocabulary kind of a personal thing that I ahh understand that I need to learn and remember the vocabulary but my problem is that I don't know how to link up those vocabulary so that I can utter uhm complete sentences.

When participants were asked to comment on what they thought the qualities of a good language learner were, many were not able to speak coherently on this topic, either in the abstract or in concrete terms about their own language learning. Thus, even though they all had experiences, and in many cases multiple experiences, of language learning, it became clear to interviewers that few participants could answer this question, even when this was rephrased in concrete terms about the participant's own language learning. This suggests an inability to reflect on the nature of language learning or awareness of what might be helpful to them.

These issues are compounded when strong L1 networks mean that these learners can access services and interact socially in their first language, so their exposure to spoken English is limited, and they have only limited opportunities to practise their speaking. As discussed in the following section, many participants found few opportunities to interact in English.

## 5.2 Social isolation and opportunities to practise speaking English

Speaking is something that learners feel is vitally important and their ability to communicate and be understood in English is often the yardstick by which they measure their progress in English (Yates and Williams 2003). Among the many factors that contribute to the development of speaking skills are the motivations and opportunities that learners have to use and develop their skills both inside and outside the classroom. As Duff, Wong and Early (2002) emphasise in their study of migrants on a vocational course in Canada, difficulty

practising English outside the classroom is one of the major obstacles to language learning.

As discussed in previous chapters, most of the participants reported few opportunities to speak English and many seemed to be socially isolated. This severely restricted their opportunities for improving their spoken English through social interaction with both native and non-native speakers of English. This sense of isolation was particularly evident at lower levels, as has been found in previous studies (cf Perdue 1993; Bremer et al 1996; Norton 2000). Some participants reported that they did not go out much, perhaps only for shopping with spouses, and did not have Australian friends. Even participants who could not rely on having services available in their L1 did not always feel that they had the opportunity to use much English outside class, as described by the two participants in the examples below.

***Roy, C02, CSWE III, Q1***

- R: And why do you think your speaking's not getting better?
- Roy: Because ahm – I seldom speak English.
- R: Uhmhm
- Roy: With after arrival here.
- R: Uhmhm.
- Roy: Just only in classroom.
- R: Yeah. So you need more opportunities.
- Roy: Yeah yeah.
- R: Speaking outside. Okay. Do you think the school can help with that?
- Roy: Just little bit because ah in classroom we speak only the teaching time is very –
- R: Too short.

***Bryan, C02, CSWE III, Q1***

- Bryan: Ahh but the difficult is that all the barriers in Australia that I found is –
- R: Hm.
- Bryan: So after we left the class –
- R: Hm.
- Bryan: We – we will get difficult to find somebody to talking to them.
- R: Is it?
- Bryan: Yes.
- R: Yeah? So it's difficult to find someone where you could practise English?
- Bryan: Yes yes.

However, for many of the participants in the large metropolitan centres (in Melbourne and Sydney) there were strong L1 networks, in particular for Mandarin, Vietnamese or Arabic speakers, so they were able to use their L1 not only in the family but also for most aspects of their daily lives, including shopping, going to the doctor, going to church and to the hairdresser, and providing an accessible social network. While this mitigated the isolation and loneliness sometimes felt by those without good L1 community support in the early stages of their migration, it also impacted on their immediate need to learn English and the opportunities that they had to practise it. The example and the excerpt below illustrate the positives and the negatives of a strong L1 network.

***Elsie, C08, CSWE I***

Elsie, 39 years old, arrived in Melbourne from Lebanon in March 2008 with her husband. She had no family members in Australia and felt quite lonely and isolated at first. With her low level of English, Elsie was reluctant to go out and conduct transactions in English for fear of making mistakes. Within a few months, she and her husband found an Arabic-speaking church and she quickly made friends there with whom she can speak Arabic. She also found services, such as a hairdresser, that transact in Arabic, making it much easier for her to conduct daily interactions. Because of her L1 network, Elsie quickly felt less lonely and became more confident to go out on her own.

However, as the excerpt below illustrates, as far as language learning is concerned, a strong L1 network can also be a disadvantage.

**Tracy, C03, CSWE I, Q1**

- Int: Do you go to the doctor? What do – yes.  
Int: [L1 exchange]  
Tracy: [speaks in L1] [laughter]  
Int: Yeah she go to Vietnamese shopping centre and Vietnamese doctor  
[...]  
R: So you never you – you – you don't speak English outside. Outside the class.  
Int: [L1 exchange]  
Int: She doesn't practise English yeah outside the – the classroom.  
Tracy: [speaks in L1]  
R: Okay. So you – yeah you – you'll – yeah.  
Int: At home everybody speak Vietnamese.  
Tracy: Yeah.

Many participants who had a strong L1 network only used English in a very limited way and on limited occasions, such as in non-L1 shops, banks and when reading signs. Because they did not need to extend their use of English when outside the home, their repertoire in English was limited when compared to participants who lived in smaller cities, with fewer migrants and fewer people who spoke their L1. Participants who were reluctant to use English themselves outside the home relied on friends and family members to communicate for them when necessary. In one centre where there was a large number of Mandarin-speaking students, some participants said that they spoke Mandarin quite often in class. The participants recognised that this reliance on their L1 was holding back their progress in English.

**Olga, C03, CSWE I**

Olga, a 28-year-old female from Egypt, arrived in October 2008 with her family to live in Sydney, where she had regular contact with many of her husband's family members who spoke Arabic. Because she mainly interacted with her family and their acquaintances, she hardly spoke English, except when she had to use English-speaking shops or the bank. Even when she spoke in English, her repertoire was limited to basic transactional conversation because she did not practise her spoken English outside AMEP classes. She was quite dependent on her family and L1 network and this affected her mobility and independence in Australia. Olga admitted that she did not have many English-speaking friends and this was impacting negatively on her English-language progress.

Although her strong L1 community reduced pressure on Olga to use English, it also limited her progress by reducing her need to communicate in English.

### **5.2.1 Difficulty of speaking**

Although most participants at all levels reported that speaking in English was extremely important to them, many found it harder than they had anticipated to develop their skills in this area.

**Jake, C07, CSWE I, Q1**

- Int: Because ahh the listening and ah the speaking is much harder than writing.  
R: Yeah.  
Int: And reading.  
R: Yeah.  
Int: So.  
R: Yeah.

Int: The – much harder in listening and ah speaking.

...

Int: Ah he hopes that – if he's – the English study here ah it's better to spend more time on speaking and listening for the students yeah.

***Lucia, C09, CSWE III, Q1***

Lucia: I'm just – ah feeling totally like stuck. Like – like when I know – you know it's like I'm feeling like I'm expressing myself always in the same way or always – Using the same words and using the same –

R: Yes, so it's a restricted range of things – that you can say and do and you want to expand that, yeah.

Lucia: Exactly because I feel like robot, you know?

At the beginning, many participants found speaking in English to be a frightening experience, both inside and outside the classroom, and spoke about feeling embarrassed, self-conscious, shy and afraid. This feeling was evident at all levels, as the following excerpts show.

***John, C07, CSWE I, Q4***

John: Yeah. Sometime when ask me ah was I don't understand some word, ah I'm upset.

***Dan, C05, CSWE III, Q1***

Dan: I'm not joking you can find my hand was cold and I'm feel –

R: Really?

Dan: Yeah I'm panic I very very panic before.

This sometimes led to feelings of inadequacy and loss of confidence, both inside and outside class.

***Joy, C05, CSWE III, Q1***

Joy: I want to speak a lot in the class but ahh – but you – sometimes you are frighten maybe your answer is not correct so you will be shy and you are not – you are not speak loud in class yeah.

***Maryam, C01, CSWE II, Q2***

Maryam: And ah sometimes when I think about learning English and what – I'm when I want to speak good correctly flue– fluently I scared – Oh! It's impossible.

They also found listening and understanding spoken English challenging.

***Johnny, C01, CSWE II, Q1***

Johnny: But because I am when I in the class I can understand what teacher says.

R: Uhmhm.

Johnny: But in the bus. But on the bus. The students speak I don't understand. No.

R: Hm – Okay.

Johnny: So I'm afraid. I'm – I – I'm I'm afraid.

Many were reticent to use English outside the classroom for fear of making mistakes and said they wanted more speaking practice in class, as in the following example.

*Young, C08, CSWE I, Q4*

- R: Okay. What about when you are speaking to people? What helps you to speak to people in English?
- Int: [long L1 exchange]
- Young: [long L1 exchange]
- Int: Okay. Well I seldom I seldom talk with people in English.
- R: Aha. Hhhmm, why don't you speak in English very often? What makes it difficult?
- Young: [laughter]
- Int: [long L1 exchange]
- Young: [long L1 exchange]
- Int: Well ahm although ahm my heart tells me that ah I need to speak English but sometimes I'm afraid of making mistakes and and also I'm I'm afraid of by being embarrassed when I make mistakes.

### 5.2.2 Low proficiency, writing-focused learners in a strong L1 network

Some previous studies have suggested that a strong L1 community may impact negatively on the development of target language proficiency, at least for male participants (Evans 1986; Chiswick and Miller 2001). Thus Chiswick and Miller (2001) found that migrants showed less ability in the destination language (and used it less) the larger the portion of the population who speaks their native language. Derwing, Munro and Thomson (2007) also explained differential progress over two years between Chinese and Slavic migrants in terms of the greater cohesiveness of the Chinese community, which therefore offered newcomers less exposure to English than the Slavic community, whom they found to mix more with Canadian native speakers of English.

It was noticeable among the participants in this study that a combination of a strong L1 network, low proficiency and a strong reliance on written language set up conditions that did not appear to facilitate the development of spoken skills for some participants.

Charles, C03, CSWE I

Charles is a married Vietnamese 27-year-old male, with one child (born during the project). He was a copy machine repairer in Vietnam. He has very limited involvement in the community and relies on family to assist with translation when necessary. In Q3 he is working in his uncle's Vietnamese restaurant where the customers are mainly Vietnamese, and so has little reason to use English.

Another example is a group of Chinese-background learners at CSWE I level in one centre in a large city who had great difficulty in making progress in their spoken skills. They were generally educated, and reading and writing skills in class were stronger than their speaking skills. Outside the classroom they tended to rely on these rather than taking the risk to practise their speaking. They were hesitant to move into situations where they had to speak English, and would resort to using written language for support. For example, in order to cope with a medical encounter in hospital, Irene, a 46-year-old female from China, asked staff to write down what they were telling her and then went home to use her dictionary to translate what was being said to her.

Associated with this reluctance to take risks in speaking was a tendency to dismiss as sub-standard – and therefore not good models – the spoken English of their class peers from other language backgrounds. Thus, for example, Jeannie, a 40-year-old female from China at CSWE III level, said that she was afraid of being influenced by the incorrect pronunciations and accents of other students in the class. Such attitudes are likely to impact on the value that learners see in the group speaking activities that were routinely organised in class to practise spoken skills, and of the out-of-class social interactions that others saw as valuable language-learning opportunities, as well as important social activities.

The kinds of attitudes described above are not likely to be helpful to language learning, particularly where there are limited opportunities to use English in the community. This suggests an important role for AMEP service providers in explicitly addressing the nature of language learning and the strategies that can be used to learn and practise effectively. These strategies may involve assisting these students to become more

familiar with the characteristics of spoken as opposed to written English, and may increase their confidence in using spoken English.

### 5.2.3 Overcoming the fear of making mistakes

There was some evidence that some participants were able to work up the confidence to be able to speak without hesitation and overcome their fear of making mistakes when speaking to native English speakers. Once this hurdle was crossed, there was less reluctance to practise speaking, and improvements were evident. Alina, a 44-year-old Romanian female, found that her speaking improved once she worried less about making grammatical mistakes. By her Q3 interview, Alina reported that she had gained in confidence and progressed in her workplace and in her ability to maintain good relationships with her English-speaking step-child at home.

#### *Alina, C10, CSWE III, Q3*

- Alina: So I have – I have to communicate with people and I like, I like to – to communicate with people.
- R: Right, yeah. But also the job has opened up new things, like you've made new friends.
- Alina: Yes.
- R: That's good. And it's also helped your relationship with your step-son.
- Alina: Yes, yes.
- R: Yes. That's good.
- Alina: And made me confident in – ah in my ability, or something like that.
- R: Right yeah. Okay ... So what is it – okay, are there still things that you think you can improve in your English?
- Alina: Oh, yes. You, I still have my old habits, and this habit is reflecting not only before in the – in the writing but is reflecting in my speaking. So still I have problem with my ah syntax and ah grammatical types.
- R: Does that worry you very much?
- Alina: Um not really ... no.
- R: Okay. So I think that's a difference too, because I think you were more worried about that six months ago.
- Alina: Ah, yeah, I was very worried.
- R: Yeah. But now when you're out talking to people you just talk about what you're talking about.
- Alina: Yes.
- R: And you don't worry too much.
- Alina: But not only that – when you listen people you can um catch the – the – the good way to speak.
- R: Okay.
- Alina: So the both it's working in both way.

Alina was initially hesitant in her use of English early in the project, and in some respects resembled the learners described above in her concern for grammatical correctness in her use of English. However, when she found employment in a busy shop she realised communication rather than formal correctness was important and she overcame her reluctance to speak. This increased confidence transferred into her family life, and increased her self-esteem. In a later interview, she spoke eloquently of how she 'lost herself' in the early stages of settlement and how at that stage she could not show people who she was because of her limitations in using English. She recounted how finding fluency enabled her to improve her communication, expand her social network and show people the person she was.

Other participants who were able to make contacts and use English on a daily basis also reported improvements in their language and in their confidence to use it over the period of the project.

*Joy, C05, CSWE III, Q1*

Joy: I ... I want to ... I want to speak a lot in the class but ahh ... but You ... sometimes you are frighten maybe your answer is not correct so you will be shy and you are not, you are not speak loud in class yeah.

*Joy, C05, CSWE III, Q4*

R: Yeah. Do you talk to your uncle ...?

Joy: Yeah.

R: As often as, as you did in the past?

Joy: Er yes.

R: Mm.

Joy: I, I, I found before, before, compared with last year, when I talk with him I, I have more confidence and ah I can, I can express my my idea easily, yeah.

*Dan, C05, CSWE III, Q4*

Dan: Yeah of course Teacher 1 and all of them Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 ... all of them because they told me you are speaking good and my classmates your speaking is good how come ... but before I was, I was not confident and because I am not confident and I never try to, to make a sentence and speak before in the whole year I spent here so I, I can't stay with you I'm talking about like I'm talking now. You will ... I ... I can't put two word with each other and now I'm sitting comfortable and I'm talking to you without panic. Before it's ... it was a very hard job to ... to speak yeah I feel ...

R: Can't imagine that

Dan: I'm not joking you can find my hand was cold and I'm feel ...

R: Really.

Dan: Yeah I'm panic I very very panic before.

Progress in English and a greater awareness of different aspects of how language is used in communication can lead to a greater awareness of the gap between what a learner knows and what they need to know, and this can be demotivating, even for well-educated learners with a relatively long history of English-language learning. As learners increase their knowledge and awareness of the language, they also become more aware of how much more they have to learn. So while the sense of progress can be cause for satisfaction, it can also lead to feelings of frustration and exasperation over the thought that their English may never reach the level that they desire. An example of this issue can be seen in the case of Anna, a 39-year-old female participant from China, discussed in earlier chapters.

Anna, C05, CSWE III

Anna arrived in Melbourne from China in May 2008 with her husband. She was an ophthalmologist with 17 years of formal education, which included English-language training at both secondary and tertiary levels. Because of her extensive training, Anna had been confident of her ability to speak in English prior to enrolling in AMEP classes. In the early stages of data collection, Anna expressed little concern over her oracy skills and focused her efforts a lot more towards improving her literacy skills as she was preparing herself for an IELTS test to get her optometrist qualification in Australia. However, when she started pronunciation classes in Q3, Anna began realising that her pronunciation was not as good as she had thought and she realised that this was the reason why many Australians often could not properly understand what she was saying. By Q4 she articulated her new understanding that pronouncing every syllable clearly was not the key to being understood, because that is not how fluent speakers pronounce words. The more she learned about Australian English, the more she realised what she did not know.

## 5.2.4 Importance of AMEP

Given the relative social isolation of most participants and their fear of speaking English, the AMEP played a vital role in many participants' lives, not only in the provision of language instruction, but also as an important source of social contact through English. As noted above, participants at all levels reported that the AMEP was an important source of social support, friendship, social networking, and information about local social and community services in Australia. For many, it was a 'safe' way to try out their English and the only place where they didn't feel lost.

For quite a few, it also appeared to be the only place where they spoke English and sometimes the only place in which they spoke with English native speakers (ie their teachers and advisors). For these participants, once they had left the AMEP, their English-speaking social networks dwindled or even disappeared completely. Maryam, an Iranian female with children, who had a baby during the project period, reported very little English-language use outside the classroom in Q1, and when she left the AMEP she found that she hardly used English at all.

### *Maryam, C01, CSWE II, Q1*

- R: [laughter] How about your daughter, her school. When you go to her school? Do you speak in English?
- Maryam: [laughter] Let tell me the true.
- R: [laughter]
- Maryam: [laughter] I never go to [laughter] my daughter's ahm school. [laughter] Just – yeah you know? Yeah I contacted them! But you know ahm ahm teacher Iranian teacher? Is in my daughter's school? When I want to ta– [laughter] contact. [laughter]
- R: Oh! Okay.
- Maryam: Contact ahm my daughter's school? Just speak to her. [laughter]
- R: Oh! It means you don't need English at all!
- Maryam: [laughter]

### *Maryam, C01, CSWE II, Q4*

- Maryam: Because you know – because I always stay at home – and don't ah have a relationship with other language – people you know and I don't have – I didn't have any practice ...
- R: Mmm.
- Maryam: So I think my English gets worse than before.

Such learners are obviously at risk of losing the gains they have made in the AMEP in their speaking skills.

As researchers reviewed what participants said about the speaking and listening they did in English, it was noticed that they seemed to make very little mention of using any deliberate strategies in order to improve these skills. In view of the limited opportunities for speaking practice they reported, we decided to investigate more closely their use of specific strategies to improve their access to speaking and listening practice inside and outside the classroom. The findings are reported in Section 5.3.

## 5.3 Use of speaking strategies

Foreign- or second-language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, techniques or steps used to improve progress in learning, understanding and using a second language (Oxford 1990a). They are tools for the active, self-directed involvement needed to develop second-language communication skills (O'Malley and Chamot 1990). Research has consistently shown that the conscious use of such strategies is related to good achievement and proficiency, as they promote independence in language learning (Bialystok 1981; Wenden and Rubin 1987; Chamot and Kupper 1989; Oxford 1989, 1990a, 1990b; Cohen 1990).

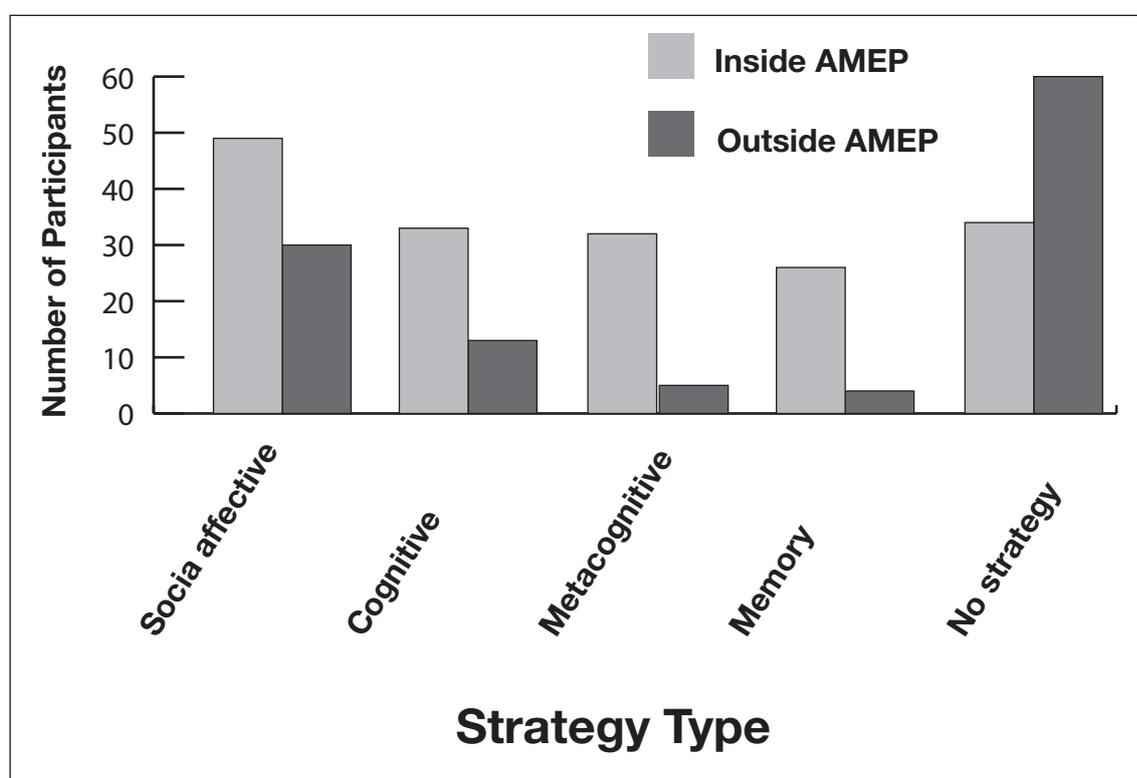
Researchers analysed the interview data for an indication of participants' attitudes to oral/aural skills development and the conscious or unconscious, independent and non-teacher-directed use of language-learning strategies to improve their listening and speaking both inside and outside class. Many participants

seemed to make very little use of these strategies and seemed largely unaware how the strategies could help them become more independent language learners, extend their social contacts and improve their communicative competence.

Analysis of the range, type and frequency of learning strategy mentioned by participants indicated that they made use of four broad language-learning strategy types. The first of these, *socioaffective* strategies, primarily relates to interacting with others as a way of facilitating learning, such as by asking for clarification or actively seeking out opportunities to use English (Oxford 1990c). *Cognitive* strategies are primarily concerned with ways of engaging with learning materials, for example by analysing a text (Oxford 1990a, 1990b), while *metacognitive* strategies are those directed towards regulating or self-directing language learning (O'Malley et al 1985), and *memory* strategies are those that assist in memorising and retrieving information (Oxford 1990a).

Figure 5.2 shows the percentages of the participants who reported making use of these strategies inside and outside the AMEP.

**Figure 5.2: Listening and speaking: talk about language-learning strategy use**



In their interviews, participants were asked about their language learning, and what helped and what did not: they were not specifically asked about these four types of strategies. As can be seen from the graph, many made no mention at all during the study of any of these language-learning strategies, and such strategy use as was reported related mostly to speaking and listening inside the AMEP rather than outside. That is, they either made very little use of these strategies or were not aware of or able to articulate the strategies they did use.

Thirty-four per cent (52 individuals) did not mention any form of language-learning strategy inside the AMEP and 60% (91 individuals) did not mention the use of any language-learning strategy to assist their listening and speaking skills outside the AMEP. While this result may in part reflect the way in which the data were collected (that is, through informal semi-structured interview rather than through the targeted questionnaire and specialised inventory instruments more usually found in strategy research), participants were regularly asked about their language learning. The fact that they made so little mention of strategy use therefore suggests that either many participants were not fully aware of the strategies they were using or that they did not use them.

The strategy types used most often both inside and outside the AMEP appeared to be those with strong social orientation. Thus 49% (74 participants) said they made use of at least one socioaffective strategy inside the AMEP, while 30% (45 participants) said they used a socioaffective strategy outside the AMEP. Less use was made of other strategy types. There appeared to be no particular effect on strategy use for L1, cultural background, age, gender or marital status. Although participants with higher education levels did report a slightly higher use of three or more strategy types, the converse did not appear to be the case. That is, it was not necessarily those with lower levels of education in the sample who had low or no use of strategies. Table 5.1 gives examples of the strategies that participants at different CSWE levels reported using.

**Table 5.1: Examples of strategies used by learners at different CSWE levels**

CSWE level	Reported strategies
CSWE I	Reads aloud to her daughter, who corrects her (Li Huang, C08) Speaks to neighbours from non-English-speaking backgrounds (Lorraine, C03)
CSWE II	Watches TV and listens to radio to practise listening (Kristina, C01; Vinny, C01)
CSWE III	Joined the 'Huggies Club' for parents to talk about baby care (got good advice for breastfeeding, too) (Faith, C02) Watches TV every night with her husband; he asks her about the news afterwards and they have discussions about it (Anne, C06) Makes up sentences to try out with her husband (Lila, C09)

Over the period of the study, some participants changed their attitudes to and awareness of strategy use as they gained in confidence. For example, by Q4 Dan had gained in confidence and was deliberately going out of his way to find people to talk to in English.

***Dan, C05, CSWE III, Q4***

R: Is there anything new?  
 Dan: Anything new? Yeah I started to work a lot on myself, like – like I told you I'm in TAFE, at work, with my brother, with any – just like – I always try to find a situation like that so I can go out and speak in English, you know ...  
 R: Mm ...  
 Dan: All the time I'm trying to find a place that I can speak English in.

Others do not appear to have developed their awareness of strategy use at all.

***Heather, C03, CSWE I, Q1***

R: What do you do at home for example to learn English or to study by yourself?  
 Heather: Mmm ...  
 Int: [long L1 exchange]  
 Int: At home yeah she doesn't do anything no homework – and she doesn't speak to anybody in English.

***Heather, C03, CSWE I, Q4***

R: Okay. And right, they speak quite – yeah sometimes they do most of the time. Okay, it – have you ever tried to tell them to repeat?  
 Int: [L1 exchange]  
 Int: No.

Overall, these results suggest that participants' strategy use may be largely unconscious and perhaps more motivated by a strong desire for social interaction than by a desire for formal language learning. This suggests that there may be scope for a more specific focus in the AMEP on strategies that may be useful for the development of speaking and listening skills, both inside and outside the classroom. Skills- and strategy-based language training is currently an integral part of the CSWE syllabus. However, although there was

some evidence of attention to strategy in the classroom data and materials collected in the project, not much attention appears to have been given to strategy training or awareness raising. Given the limited opportunities for spoken interaction that many migrants appear to have, increased attention to strategy would appear to be one area in which explicit instruction might help to develop learners' awareness of what they might be able to do to increase their exposure to English and gain more from the interactions they do encounter.

## 5.4 Summary and implications

This chapter has explored some of the issues faced by participants as they learned to speak in English. Analysis of the data has resulted in the following findings.

- Many learners had little opportunity to develop speaking skills in the community, particularly if they were in larger cities and supported by a strong L1 network.
- AMEP classes played an important role in providing not only instruction but also a venue and social network that was important to, and in some cases provided the only source of, speaking practice in English.
- Most learners were very keen to develop their speaking skills but were not always fully aware of the nature of this undertaking. Prior education and English-language learning were not always an advantage, particularly if it encouraged them to rely heavily on the written language.
- Many participants seemed to lack a clear sense of the nature of language learning and made relatively little deliberate use of strategies to enhance their speaking skills.

These findings not only highlight the importance of the AMEP for the development of skills in both speaking and literacy, but also suggest some implications for the program, including an important role for explicit attention to:

- the nature of language learning and how this can be approached successfully, and
- strategies that learners can use both inside and outside the classroom in order to develop speaking skills.

# Chapter 6

## Conclusion and recommendations



# Chapter 6

## Conclusion and recommendations

The aim of this project was to follow newly arrived migrants over a 12-month period of their settlement in Australia in order to find out how they use English and how closely their engagement with English in the AMEP matched these communicative needs. In this section we address this general issue and consider what has been learned from the project about the needs of this group. Recommendations for the provision of AMEP-related services will be made on the basis of these conclusions. These recommendations should not be taken to imply that such services are not currently being provided. As discussed below, the participants were generally very content with the AMEP. Rather, the intention is to highlight the importance of these services to our participants as revealed in this study and to suggest modifications where appropriate.

As has been argued above, while the needs of individuals obviously varied, the kinds of community interactions that participants engaged in were broadly similar in a number of respects across all migrant groups, particularly as they related to the issues and routines they encountered in early settlement. Examination of the data has shown that these closely match the topics offered in the AMEP, and that participants were very satisfied with their experiences on the program, which seemed to not only address their needs in general, but also to offer social support and information at a crucial period in their settlement. They reported that the program assisted them not only to make progress in English, but also to learn about life in Australia and develop many of the skills that they needed for settlement. This suggests that there was generally a good level of fit between the participants' needs and the topics provided in the AMEP.

### Recommendation 1

The AMEP should remain committed to assisting newly arrived migrants to acquire the language they need to attend to the issues and routines they encounter in early settlement.

Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity the AMEP offered to become acquainted with colloquial Australian English for everyday life and to find out more about aspects of life and culture in Australia. Language and cultural information related to vocations and the workplace seems to be of increasing interest to learners at higher levels of CSWE, while daily life topics seem to be particularly relevant at early CSWE levels. This suggests that a focus on understanding the Australian workplace and pathways to appropriate employment might be particularly suitable at CSWE III.

### Recommendation 2

The AMEP should retain a focus on English for everyday life, including colloquial Australian English.

### Recommendation 3

The AMEP should include an increased focus on understanding the Australian workplace at CSWE III.

While workplace language and culture was of particular interest to higher-level participants, the range of employment they found suggests that it would be difficult to cater for the diversity of specific language in the workplace. Rather, a more achievable aim would be to target general workplace issues and language, together with strategies for finding out the specific language requirements of particular occupations or industries. The experience of some participants also illustrates the importance of scheduling classes flexibly to accommodate the needs of learners with different commitments and life circumstances.

### Recommendation 4

The approach to workplace issues and language in the AMEP should be generic in nature and should include a focus on the strategies clients can use outside the classroom to gain the specific language they will need for particular occupations or industries.

## **Recommendation 5**

AMEP classes should be scheduled as flexibly as possible to cater for the diverse client base.

Analysis of the opportunities for social interaction in English reported by the participants over the one-year data collection period has also highlighted the important role of the AMEP, not only in developing social language but also in developing social networks. With often limited opportunities for engaging in social talk in English with native speakers, clients would benefit from explicit attention to this area of language development, not only in the content of classes, but also in extracurricular activities that can help to foster social networks. While it is unrealistic to expect that migrants will necessarily be able to make instant friends among the settled English-speaking community, they would nevertheless benefit from more explicit instruction on the strategies they could use to increase their contact with English speakers. By the same token, outreach programs to help English native speakers better understand the communicative needs of new arrivals and involve them in joint social activities would be useful.

## **Recommendation 6**

The AMEP should include explicit attention to language learning and social networking strategies.

## **Recommendation 7**

The important role of the AMEP in assisting newly arrived migrants to develop social networks should be explicitly acknowledged and promoted through timetabled social activities.

## **Recommendation 8**

DIAC should consider the development and promotion of community outreach programs to increase awareness in the broader community of migrant issues and strategies for interacting with speakers from different language backgrounds, in particular programs that bring expert speakers of English and newly arrived migrants together.

The insight into language use in the family given by this project has also highlighted some issues that may impact on settlement success in the longer term and that could be usefully addressed as part of an early settlement program. These include information for migrants, partners and other family members on how to support both English-language development and first-language maintenance in the home. It was clear from our data that many families were struggling with these issues and explicit coverage of how they can be tackled would be helpful for migrants in mixed-language households. Since the children in the family are likely to develop good English-language skills and social networks rapidly at school, and are also likely to encounter the kinds of cultural values espoused by young Australians, it is important for families to be supported to work through language-use issues to minimise the disconnection between family members that might otherwise ensue.

## **Recommendation 9**

The AMEP should explicitly tackle issues of how to support both English-language development and first-language maintenance in the home.

The project has also been able to explore the goals and post-AMEP pathways of participants and highlight the implications of these for the program. This analysis has shown that well-educated participants at CSWE III and particularly those interested in well-defined professions were able to articulate their goals and pathways towards them quite clearly, while those at lower levels of CSWE and those who had less education or a less well-defined occupation in mind were not always able to do so. Many participants were engaged in this period in refocusing their goals, retraining for new goals or refreshing their previous training, and so were in particular need of advice on requirements, opportunities and pathways in Australia. This suggests an important role early in their settlement for careful and sensitive counselling with advisers who are able to communicate effectively with learners with a range of needs and levels of English.

As far as particular employment pathways are concerned, our data suggest that there is considerable interest in childcare, aged care and beauty therapy among women, and in interpreting and setting up in a small business for both genders. There also appeared to be a strong interest in further study, which was not always

pursued within the data collection period. The uncertainty about employment goals seen particularly in lower-level learners, and the fact that some of these early preferences were not pursued, underlines the importance of sensitive advice that can help clients to explore a range of options. In particular, clients may need advice on how to access occupations and pathways that are less stereotypical occupations for migrants, and on how they can be supported to undertake further training. This is a particular need for younger new arrivals. Migrants with families who feel the pressure to curtail their studies in favour of paid employment would benefit from advice on how they can be supported to study and manage their financial responsibilities effectively.

## **Recommendation 10**

Counselling services capable of providing sensitive advice and ongoing support on how to develop goals and pursue pathways to further study and employment should be available for all clients in a timely manner and on a regular basis.

It was also evident that some participants lacked a clear understanding of the level of English required for different pathways. Associated with this was often an incomplete understanding of the nature of adult language learning, the role of the learner, and strategies that they could use to maximise their engagement with and learning of English. While this is entirely understandable, it does suggest that migrants might benefit from more explicit attention to the nature of language learning and the language-learning strategies that they can use inside and outside the classroom. Learning an additional language as an adult is a significant undertaking, and a process that will continue for an extended period. It is unrealistic to expect that classes will provide all the input and practice that learning to operate in another language requires. This suggests an important role for explicit, ongoing and reflective assistance with what it means to learn and use a language and what learners can do to find out more about the linguistic contexts they need to know about. These include engagement with authentic contexts of spoken and written language use.

## **Recommendation 11**

The AMEP should include increased explicit attention to the nature of language learning and the strategies that migrants can use to enhance their language learning inside and outside the classroom.

Although securing employment was an important goal for most participants and approximately half of them were successful in finding a job, it was a noticeable, if unsurprising, trend that only a few participants were able to work in their pre-migration occupations, and all but one of these were at CSWE III level. The CSWE I participants in the study were less likely to be either working or studying. Since learners at this level have the least English and therefore are likely to have the most difficulty engaging with community members in English, it is important that they maintain contact with English-speaking services in some form if they are not to become marginalised. Given the reports of some participants that their English was deteriorating after the end of their AMEP hours as their English-speaking networks dwindled, it is especially important that they have access to some kind of further engagement with English. This suggests that it may be particularly important to attend to pathways and transition to further study for clients at lower levels, particularly in the light of some of the gaps and anomalies in the post-AMEP pathways relating to provision of English-language programs for higher-level study and eligibility for courses.

## **Recommendation 12**

Particular attention should be given to the provision of guidance on the pathways to further study available to clients at lower CSWE levels.

Overall, the insights into the participants' lives provided by this project have illustrated the ways and contexts in which they use English over a one-year period in their early settlement, and the important role played by the AMEP in the development of their language and social networks during this time. Continued research into how they build on these foundations as they build their lives in Australia would provide further valuable insight into the longer term-impact of the AMEP on their settlement experiences.

## **Recommendation 13**

The settlement experiences of the participants in this study should be followed for a further period.



# Appendix 1

## Centre descriptions



# Appendix 1: Centre descriptions

## Centre 01

Centre 01 is located on the first two floors of a four-level building, which it shares with other businesses in the central business district of Parramatta, New South Wales. It is within five minutes walking distance from a shopping centre, and it is located on a street that is one of the main arteries for people to access the shopping centre and other business establishments within the area.

Parramatta is a culturally diverse middle-class suburb in the Sydney metropolitan area. According to the Census 2006, almost 38% of its population speaks a language other than English at home. A relatively large proportion of the overseas-born population is from North-East Southern and central Asia. It also has a young population with just over 40% of the population under 15 yrs old (ABS 2008a).

The centre serves around 250 clients from a number of ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which reflect the overall population in the area. The majority of clients are of Chinese descent. There are also people of Indian ethnicity, Farsi and Dari speakers from Iran and Afghanistan, and Arabic speakers from Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Sudan. The selected class is CSWE II.

## Centre 02

Centre 02 is located in a five-storey building that also houses the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre and a number of other not-for-profit organisations. The centre is adjacent to the Blacktown TAFE, and is a walking distance from the Blacktown Railway Station and the Blacktown Hospital.

Blacktown, New South Wales, is culturally and linguistically diverse, with more than 184 countries and 156 languages represented within its total population of 271 710 recorded for 2006. Dominant countries of origin are the Philippines with 16 129 people, India with 7,255 people, New Zealand with 6,651 people, England with 6238 people and Fiji with 5387 people (Blacktown City Council nd).

The centre has 290 clients. The most dominant language groups are Bengali, Gujerati, Hindi and Tamil, followed by Chinese, Dinka and Arabic. The selected class is CSWE III.

## Centre 03

Centre 03 is located in the central business district of Bankstown, New South Wales.

Bankstown is at the centre of the south-western railway line connecting the city's inner west to the south-west of the Sydney metropolitan area. Along the line are some of the most ethnically diverse settlements – from Lakemba to Cabramatta. All these suburbs are densely populated by some major communities of Arabic, Vietnamese and Chinese backgrounds.

The centre enrolls about 1,300 clients over a one-year period, or 650 per term. The clients are mainly from Arabic-speaking countries, Vietnam and China, and they are mostly under 30 years of age. The class selected for the study has 23 students at CSWE I level. The 16 participants in the study comprised eight Arabic speakers (three from Egyptian and five from Lebanese backgrounds), seven Vietnamese and one Singhalese.

## Centre 04

Centre 04 was dropped from the study before the start of data collection for logistical reasons.

## Centre 05

Centre 05 is located in the Institute of Languages at the University of New South Wales. It shares premises and facilities with two other departments (English for Academic Purposes and General English) on the Kensington campus.

Kensington is a suburb located six kilometres south-east of the Sydney central business district, in the local government area of the City of Randwick. Numerous buses service Kensington, linking it with the city and surrounding suburbs. However, there are no trains or light-rail services to the area. Kensington has a wide range of ethnicities, with 56.4% of residents born in Australia. The most common countries of origin for the remaining residents include the United Kingdom, Indonesia, New Zealand and China. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are in the minority, with only 39 in Kensington.

Twelve participants at CSWE III level from Centre 05 took part in the study. Participants' home languages were Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin, Spanish, Indonesian, Portuguese, Thai and Vietnamese. Eight of the participants had tertiary degrees, three had partial tertiary qualification and one had up to secondary education.

## Centre 06

Centre 06 is an AMEP centre located in the Southbank Institute of Technology. The centre is located in the heart of Brisbane's cultural precinct in the city centre. It is three minutes walk from the train station.

The city of Brisbane has a high Australian-born population. In 2006, 25.6% of the total population of 992 176 people were born overseas. Only 15% of the total population speak a community language other than English (ABS 2008b). The selected class is CSWE III.

## Centre 07

Centre 07 is an AMEP centre located within a city centre campus of TAFE South Australia in Adelaide situated on the fourth and fifth floors of a high-rise building in the most central shopping mall in the city's central business district. There is also a campus located in Salisbury.

The centre serves more than 1800 clients from a number of ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds that reflect the overall population in the area. Most clients are people of Asian descent. There are also people of African ancestry from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi, Arabic speakers from Iraq, Spanish speakers from Brazil and Peru, people from Serbia and also people with Bosnian ancestry. The selected class is pre-CSWE/CSWE I and is made up of 16 participants.

## Centre 08

Centre 08 is part of the Foundation Studies Department of the Institute of TAFE, which is part of a consortium of AMEP providers across the northern region of Melbourne. It is housed in buildings that were formerly a secondary school, in the middle northern suburbs of Melbourne. The suburb is located in a public transport hub with train, bus and tram routes passing through, and it has good public transport links with the city centre and other suburbs.

The suburb has a long history of migrant settlement and has a population of migrants and working-class Australian-born residents. There are significant migrant communities in surrounding suburbs that use facilities close to the centre, including a culturally diverse market and retail facilities, municipal and legal offices and a migrant resource centre. Clients come from a variety of ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds and noticeable numbers are from China, and they travel from different parts of Melbourne, although most live in the inner suburban areas. The selected class is CSWE I.

## Centre 09

Centre 09 is located in Melbourne's city centre in the legal and business (rather than commercial) district. It is close to an underground train station, as well as city tram and bus stops. Classrooms occupy five levels of the building and are accessed by two central lifts. There is a cafe co-located at the ground floor entrance to the building and a newsagency on the other side. At the end of the entrance foyer is a general reception area for the building.

Since the centre is centrally located in the central business district and close to public transport, students come from different parts of Melbourne, although most live in the inner suburban areas. Students are culturally and ethnically diverse, and there are a range of activities in the centre (such as multicultural week and dance classes) that attempt to encourage and harness inter-cultural harmony.

There are approximately 600 students enrolled in the programs at the centre, about 250 of whom are young adults in the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students.

## Centre 10

Centre 10 is located in a large TAFE campus on the fringe of the central business district of Hobart. It is located in two buildings on opposite sides of a major intersection. It is close to other public services and offices, such as Hobart's main hospital, central police station and law courts. The central retail area is a short walk from the centre. The city's public transport focuses on the city centre, so even if buses do not connect directly to the TAFE, it is only a short walk from the central bus terminal and bus stops in the city centre. The AMEP teachers are experienced and well qualified and hold culturally diverse classes. Some have experience teaching in the AMEP in other parts of Australia, as well as experience in teaching English overseas. There is a friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the centre, and there is a feeling that both teachers and students know each other well and get on well together. The selected class for this centre is CSWE level III, with 13 participants.

## Centre 11

Centre 11 is located in Central TAFE in a modern building that is centrally located in Perth. It is five-minute walk from the central train station, behind the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the museum and the State Library. The reception of the AMEP centre is situated in the North Wing on Level 3. The centre conducts courses on Level 3, especially the north and east wings, but they do not have exclusive access to the area. The centre is easily reachable either on foot from the central station or by means of buses. Perth has free inner-city buses and one stops in front of the building. Students attending classes at AMEP Central TAFE live all over town.

The centre has about 1400 clients enrolled in AMEP courses. The centre offers courses at all levels and intensities, from pre-CSWE to CSWE III, full-time, part-time, night classes, and Saturday morning classes. The centre also offers a range of 'Migrant Pathways to Employment' courses that are specialised English courses preparing students for the language uses in particular industries.

## Centre 12

Centre 12 is located in a TAFE that moved out of the Perth city centre into a more suburban area after Q1. During Q1 the centre was located in the central business district of Perth, where it had been for six years, a ten-minute walk from the central station and main shopping area. It occupied three floors in a ten-storey office building with a small shop and cafeteria on the ground floor, where students and staff could get reasonably priced meals and drinks. The centre offered courses in pre-CSWE to CSWE III levels, which were offered in the mornings, afternoons and evenings. Other courses included distance learning, home tutor schemes, classes such as 'Senior First Aid', 'English for Driving – Learner's Permit', 'Language of Childbirth' or 'Information Technology'. Participants from this centre lived all over town.

From Q2 onwards the centre was split between two campuses in Carlisle and Thornlie, which are about a 20–30 minute train/bus ride away from the city. The majority of the participants who signed up for this project (seven out of ten) decided to attend classes in Carlisle: five continued on in the same class with the teacher–researcher, and the remaining two in two different classes at the same centre. The new campus is located opposite Oats Street Station. The Carlisle campus is small and friendly and students from all classes mingle in the break. The AMEP shares a building with the auto-electrical and automotive classrooms, offices and management.

The Thornlie campus is larger and has most of the administration staff, the distance learning centre and all the other special services they provide.



## **Appendix 2**

# **Participants' reported first languages**



## Appendix 2: Participants' reported first languages

Reported L1	Number of participants
Mandarin	29
Arabic	18
Vietnamese	12
Korean	8
Thai	7
Spanish	6
Farsi	5
Filipino/Tagalog	5
Japanese	4
Cantonese	3
Portuguese	3
Bahasa Indonesia	2
Chin	2
Dinka	2
French	2
Gujarati	2
Kirundi	2
Punjabi	2
Shanghainese	2
Sinhala	2
Unknown	2
Amharic	1
Balinese	1
Bari	1
Bosnian	1
Bulgarian	1
Burmese	1
Czech	1
Dari	1
Digo	1
Ecuadorian Spanish	1
Hakka Chin	1
Hindi	1
Kannada	1
Karen	1
Khmer	1
Krio	1
Liberian English	1

*Cont ...*

Cont ...

<b>Reported L1</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Lithuanian	1
Persian	1
Polish	1
Romanian	1
Russian	1
Serbian	1
Somali	1
Susu	1
Swahili	1
Tamil	1
Tigrinya	1
Urdu	1
Uygur	1
Zandi	1
Zhuang dialect	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>152</b>

# **Appendix 3**

## **Coding categories used in basic NVivo analysis**



# Appendix 3: Coding categories used in basic NVivo analysis

NVivo is a computer program that can be used to code and manage qualitative data. Spoken data were transcribed and these, together with textual and photographic data, were loaded into the program to provide project team members with a systematic way of accessing and analysing them. At project team meetings a preliminary set of themes useful in addressing our research questions was drawn up. This was further modified once coding had started and we had further insight into the project data. Project team members first coded the data under the major themes in this list. At later stages of analysis, data from different participants coded under these themes could be accessed, compared and further analysed, allowing us to track both larger trends and individual experiences. A list of the major themes coded is given below:

## 1. AMEP

- Classes in the AMEP
- What their AMEP classes should include/have included, particularly in relation to more opportunities of learning across the macro skills (reading/ writing/listening/speaking)
- Assessment or opinion of the AMEP + attitude; + positive/negative
- Indirect opinions of the AMEP + attitude; + positive/negative
- Any non-language learning that takes place while they are in the AMEP, including intentional (curriculum-driven) or incidental learning

## 2. Direct comment on fit between learning in the AMEP and settlement

- How their English-language learning is directly related to their settlement
- How any other learning in the AMEP is related to their settlement in Australia

## 3. Language learning

- Formal and informal language learning during and after the AMEP
- Formal and informal language learning before migration + pre-migration
- Strategies in language learning

## 4. Settlement/communities

- Attitudes toward/participation in/opinion of their community + attitude; + positive/negative
- Participation in their community
- Broader Australian community
- Local (neighbourhood) community
- Ethnic community and their ethnic association
- Access to services available
- Comments on and opinion about living in Australia + attitude;  
+ positive/negative

## 5. Expectations/needs/goals/aspirations

- Expectations/needs/goals/aspirations for themselves and their family in relation to their life in Australia
- Expectations/needs/goals/aspirations in relation to their work and future study
- Hopes for the future, as well as concrete plans
- Expectations and assumptions on any aspect of their language learning or settlement that were either confirmed or proven untrue

## 6. Family

- Use of English with family members + use of English
- Use of other languages with family members + other languages
- Support from family members
- Comparisons between self and family members in relation to language learning or settlement

## 7. Friends

- Use of English with friends + use of English
- Use of other languages with friends + other languages
- Support from friends
- Comparisons between self and peers in relation to language learning or settlement

## 8. Employment

- Anything work-related
- Work experience prior to migration + pre-migration
- Work aspirations now that they are in Australia
- Processes of finding work
- Experiences in finding work so far and their thoughts on how easy or difficult it is for them to find work

## 9. Significant events

- Critical incidents or experiences that the participant highlights which they consider as significantly impacting their settlement or language-learning experience, whether it be inside or outside the classroom
- Specific events and/or experiences which to the participant are a cause for satisfaction or measure of degree of achievement

## 10. Use of English

- Use of English prior to migration + pre-migration
- Language network – when and where they use English on a regular basis
- Where and when they use English now that they are in Australia
- Views on the kind of English they or their family should be using + attitudes
- Issues of pronunciation and perceptions of intelligibility
- Use of English in relation to settlement + settlement/communities

## 11. Use of other languages

- Use of L1 or other languages prior to migration + pre-migration
- Use of L1 or other languages in Australia
- Where and when they use L1 or other languages
- Specific activities or events where they use L1 or other languages
- Use of their L1 or other languages in relation to settlement + settlement/communities

## 12. Education (non-AMEP)

- Formal and informal learning outside the AMEP during or after 510 hours (eg TAFE, LLNP)
- Formal and informal learning prior to migration including school and post-secondary + pre-migration

### **13. Migration and citizenship**

- Reasons and motivations for migration
- Attitudes towards migration and citizenship + attitudes, + positive/negative
- Migration process (how they came to Australia)
- Long-term plans to stay in Australia or alternative plans

### **14. Identity**

- Perceptions of themselves
- Perceptions of their family + family
- Multilingual identities (how they use their ethnicity and/or their language to negotiate everyday affairs)
- Gendered experiences of language learning and settlement

### **15. Pre-migration**

- Anything related to their lives prior to coming to Australia

### **16. Change or development**

- Participants' reflection on their own change or development + language learning; + language use; + settlement or communities; + attitudes

### **17. Emotion**

- Participants' reflection on their feelings or emotional state in relation to settlement, language learning or language use + settlement/communities; + language learning; + use of English; + use of other languages
- Instances of strong emotion during interview (eg crying)

### **18. Positive**

- Anything the participant considers positively
- Use in combination with other nodes

### **19. Negative**

- Anything the participant considers negatively
- Use in combination with other nodes

### **20. Attitudes**

- Any data depicting attitudes
- Use in combination with other nodes

### **21. Pronunciation**

- Participants' comments about pronunciation or pronunciation issues, either their own pronunciation or understanding Australian pronunciation, and perceptions of their own or others' intelligibility. Any examples of the interviewer having trouble understanding what the participant says.



# References

The bottom half of the page features three overlapping, wavy, light blue lines that create a sense of motion and depth, set against a solid medium blue background.



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