

Teaching strategies – 2

Job-focused learning at Certificate I level

These information sheets have been developed by the AMEP Research Centre to provide AMEP teachers with specific information on issues and strategies currently affecting their students. They provide background information as well as useful references.

The *AMEP Information sheets* have been funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs through the Special Projects Research Program, and have been informed by the Australian-based research that the program has funded. The *AMEP Information sheets* can be accessed through the Professional Connections website: <http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep>

Context

The topic of employment and employment-related language has often been thought of as suitable only for learners at Certificate III level of the CSWE. However, some learners leave the AMEP with lower levels of English ability because they feel they need to get a job. This information sheet outlines job-focused teaching materials suitable for lower-level learners.

Issues

Learners need to earn money

Learners are anxious to start earning money (even if they have Centrelink benefits as a result of being on a humanitarian visa) so that they can pay back debts to family members or send money to other family members who may be in difficult circumstances. Although learners know they need more English to negotiate life in Australia, they often feel they have to make a choice between staying in class to learn English and earning money. To address this, learners have requested jobs-related content in their English classes.

Relevance of language learning materials

Learners in the AMEP Research Centre project focusing on 'changing clients' wanted topics and tasks that they saw as relevant to their needs (Wigglesworth 2003). Some clients expressed the need to find work and wanted their English classes to address this need. As the following graphs show, even though the proportion of work-related withdrawals from classes at Certificate I level is small, the numbers increase at Certificate II level, and these figures combined suggest that the need to address employment is not confined to learners at Certificate III level.¹

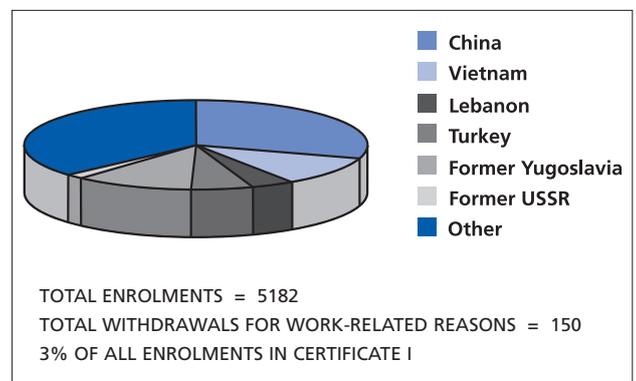


Figure 1: Certificate I withdrawals for work-related reasons 1/1/03–30/9/03

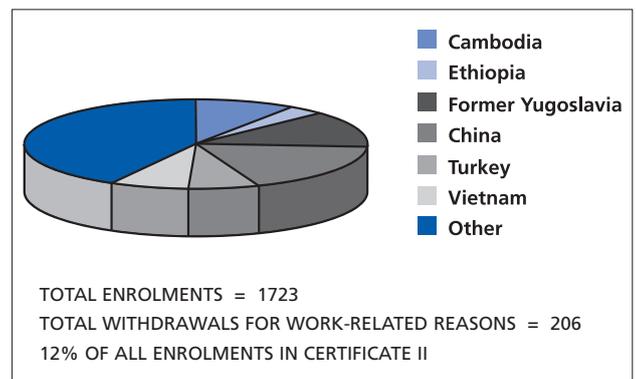


Figure 2: Certificate II withdrawals for work-related reasons 1/1/03–30/9/03

The graphs presented above include only those learners who withdrew and who also did not re-enrol during the period January to September 2003. The numbers would be significantly higher if they included those clients who withdrew for a period of time and then re-entered the AMEP (such as those doing seasonal work) or those whose attendance was sporadic due to work-related issues. Work-related withdrawal appeared to be a widespread phenomenon across genders, cultural backgrounds, regions of settlement, and age levels.

Understanding the job market and learner options

Learners at lower levels of English need help not only to negotiate their way into the job market, but also to understand that there is a distinction between short-term and long-term work-related goals. It is possible that the immediate need to earn money can still be met without jeopardising the more secure future that better English levels may confer. There is, therefore, a need to embed within English lessons for learners at lower levels materials and activities that help them experience the relevance of continuing their English learning even when they have gained employment.

Some concerns arise in preparing to teach low-level, newly arrived, adult ESL learners about employment. Many would say that their language levels are so low that it is not realistic or even fair to float or support ideas of job seeking. An obvious concern is that Certificate I students do not yet have the kind of English required to cope with the complexity of concepts and information involved in discussing work-related issues. There is also the dilemma that in most Certificate I classes students range from those whose primary goal is to find a job to those who do not foresee working at all.

Engaging the range of needs of Certificate I learners

The challenge, therefore, is to meet the needs of those students who are preoccupied with financial concerns and whose minds (and often bodies) are frequently not in the classroom. This needs to be done in a realistic way so that these students are not led to believe that there is an easy pathway to employment nor that the classroom provides guarantees of employment. Using job-focused materials can help motivate these students within the classroom as well as giving them vital information about Australian working life and cultural mores. An employment focus can also be a vehicle for acquainting students with multiple aspects of the wider Australian culture and infrastructure, and can therefore also be relevant for those who have no immediate interest in finding a job. This approach is consistent with a need to emphasise learners' initial and ongoing language learning, as well as the maintenance and upgrading of their qualifications.

Cultural sensitivities

There is also a need to balance teaching students about Australian work culture with their own sensitivities and perceptions. For example, in preparing this project we received feedback from African communities which indicated that many African students feel that, in Australia, they are perceived as only being suited to menial jobs. Part of the approach needs to explicitly address this perception and to

encourage students to make choices in light of both short-term and long-term needs. Materials need to open up options for jobs that positively reflect learners' prior qualifications and experience. Nevertheless, many students have no formal training or paid work experience. Therefore, all prior learning experiences need to be explored to see how they can contribute to employability in Australia without generating unrealisable (short-term) expectations.

Strategies

Through various activities, learners can have the opportunity to consider and compare the job market options available to lower-level learners, including the salary and conditions they can expect. Class activities can also help students to draw distinctions between short-term and long-term objectives, and to discuss alternative modes of AMEP delivery in ways that are meaningful to them, even if the learners are not familiar with any formal learning context. Experiences can also be provided that will enhance the learners' abilities to make decisions about employment and to prepare them for some of the issues that they will confront in seeking employment or in the workplace. The *Extending repertoires* research project which provided the basis of this information sheet explored these possibilities. Some extracts from the materials that were developed for this project are available on the Professional Connections website at <http://www.nceltr.mq.edu.au/pdamep/index.html>

Narrative text approach

A useful way to approach the dual issues of low English (and sometimes literacy) levels and the need to disseminate fairly sophisticated information and concepts is through the use of a narrative supported by information sessions with first language support. A set of five units of work was developed and trialled successfully with students at Certificate I level. The units were introduced using the narrative of a newly arrived migrant (James) looking for work, and the issues and problems he faced. The narrative involves characters who are culturally sympathetic and easily identified with, and who face many of the same dilemmas and concerns as newly arrived low-level language students. Although the main characters were realistic, an attempt was made to prevent them from being too obviously identified with one cultural group or milieu. See Extract 1 of Job-focused learning materials used in the *Extending repertoires* project.

Materials and activities

The first unit consists of an introduction to the names of jobs with matching, spelling and alphabetical order exercises, some simple grammar

puzzles, and word games. It is envisaged that this could be attempted by students with an ISLPR 0-/0+ level of English. In Unit 2 (described above), the narrative begins. James Choul is newly arrived from Kenya and wants to get a job quickly as he has pressing family obligations. He is attending English classes at AMES in Dandenong, Melbourne. He searches for work while attending English classes and utilises support from within the AMES organisation and the wider community. Several 'reality checks' are incorporated. See Extract 2 of Job-focused learning materials used in the *Extending repertoires* project.

Practical issues such as the right qualifications, skills and experience, punctuality for appointments and interviews, the ability to travel to the place of work, notifying employers of lateness and absences can all be touched on through the units, even with learners at Certificate I level. Teachers can take up these issues and expand on them as they wish. This use of a storyline means that language and grammar items can be built up gradually, reviewed and revised as the story unfolds. For example, the skill of form filling can be built up gradually from Unit 1 so that there is a basis for a simple résumé in Unit 4. See Extract 3 of Job-focused learning materials used in the *Extending repertoires* project.

In the materials, we explored thinking about skills that are relevant for various kinds of jobs through the practice of 'can' and 'can't'. We integrated grammar items such as the simple present tense while exploring the daily routine of someone's working day and duties. The materials focused on the simple past tense through time lines and talking about previous experiences. The experience in the project suggests that the last three units in particular are better taught at ISLPR 1-/1 level or at the end of CSWE I.

Bilingual support

We recommend that, concurrently with the teaching of these units, centres conduct information sessions with first language support, covering such issues as the role of Centrelink, the Job Network, ways of finding work in Australia, and other support structures that the students can access. In this way, all students can be engaged and challenged. An interview with a Learning Adviser in Unit 3 provided a context to rehearse some of this discussion, and the bilingual support offered a way of preparing for such an interview.

See Extract 4 of Job-focused learning materials used in the *Extending repertoires* project.

Job-focused learning and CSWE competencies

Job-focused learning materials can be designed so that many of the language features and skills

required to complete the tasks fit in well with the CSWE I learning outcomes. The following table maps how the five units of materials developed for this project relate to selected learning outcomes of Certificate I. (See Table 1.)

As the examples and discussion illustrate, the materials contained not only information related to jobs and the process of job seeking, but they also integrated content-appropriate linguistic elements. One of the purposes of trialling the materials was to investigate whether it was possible to explore these aspects of settling into Australia with classes at CSWE I level. The reports of the teachers involved indicate that this was the case, and some aspects of the materials that were found suitable for learners at this level are listed below.

Some activities that worked

The following sequence broadly reflects a progression from Unit 1 to Unit 5:

- Matching pictures with names of jobs
- Arranging pictures/name cards in alphabetical order
- Grammar activities – a/an; plurals; verb to be; simple present tense; simple past tense; use of conjunctive links etc
- Games involving yes/no questions, for example, 20 questions: 'What's my job?'; 'Do you ... ?'
- Surveys asking about current and past experience (obviously need to be approached with caution), wants/goals, using 'Can you ... ?'
- Recording information and being on time
- Making and keeping appointments
- Talking about short- and long-term goals – 'In one year I want to ... / In five years I want to ...'
- Personal information and form filling at various levels of difficulty
- Puzzles – findawords/crosswords
- Reading about daily routines of workers
- Reading narrative texts
- Making time lines/telling and writing recounts
- Reading job ads, leading up to Touchscreen printouts
- Reading/listening to information texts about Centrelink/Job Network providers/ways of finding work etc
- Constructing a résumé
- Investigating public transport – reading time-tables, ticket prices, zones etc

Table 1: Relationship between the units and CSWE I learning outcomes

Unit	Related information/cultural concepts	CSWE I learning outcomes
<p>Unit 1 General introduction to units Introduce occupations vocabulary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about work, with first language assistance; some discussion of language levels and pathways • Concepts of duties and goals 	<p>Module A LO3: Can locate information in an alphabetical index Module B LO1: Can provide personal information in a spoken exchange Module B LO2: Can complete a short application form Module F LO2: Can read a short information text</p>
<p>Unit 2 Making appointments with relevant counselling staff Introduction to main characters in narrative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuality • Making use of available resources • Short- and long-term goals 	<p>Module B LO1: Can provide personal information in a spoken exchange Module B LO2: Can complete a short application form Module C LO1: Can participate in a short spoken transaction Module F LO2: Can read a short information text</p>
<p>Unit 3 Discussion of learner pathways</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Idea of being able to use life experience in getting job • Using contacts to find job • Translation and recognition of qualifications • Skills • Experience (on job and other) • Further education and job training • Realistic goal setting • Discuss short-/long-term goals 	<p>Module B LO1: Can provide personal information in a spoken exchange Module D LO2: Can tell a short recount Module G LO1: Can read a short recount or narrative Module G LO2: Can write a short recount</p>
<p>Unit 4 Newspaper ads Centrelink Touchscreen Job interviews</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk by Centrelink officer with bilingual assistance • Visit to the Touchscreen computer • Public transport information • Using contacts in Australia • Discussion of different ways of finding work • Issues of reliability and punctuality 	<p>Module B LO1: Can provide personal information in a spoken exchange Module B LO2: Can complete a short application form Modules C LO1 & LO2: Can participate in a short spoken transactional exchange; Can conduct a short telephone conversation Module E LO2: Can read short instructions Module F LO2: Can read a short information text Modules K LO1 & LO2: Can interpret simple maps; Can read simple tables and graphs</p>
<p>Unit 5 Problems and management of life/job</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting priorities in different cultures/acceptable reasons for absence/lateness in Australia • Ongoing evaluation of situation, continuing to use available support • Short- and long-term goals • Ongoing education and skills development 	<p>Module B LO3: Can write a short note or message Modules C LO1 & LO2: Can participate in a short spoken transactional exchange; Can conduct a short telephone conversation Module G LO1: Can read a short narrative or recount</p>

- 'Reality check' exercises – calculating if it's worth applying for jobs in some areas; finding out about the greater metropolitan area
- Procedural texts on use of Touchscreen (spoken and written)
- Dialogues – ringing about a job; job interviews; phoning to explain absence/lateness
- Listening to and taking notes from phone calls relating to absences or lateness
- Information sessions by Centrelink and Job Network providers, as well as language centre counsellors/learning advisers with bilingual support.

Trial evaluation

These units were trialled successfully in Certificate I classes ranging from beginner-level C1 students through to those ready to advance to Certificate II classes.

The narrative structure underpinning the five units was regarded as highly relevant by both students and teachers. Students saw the material as relating to their lives and became absorbed in James's story.

Teachers trialling the materials saw a clear correlation between the exercises contained in the five units and required Certificate I learning outcomes. In addition, the materials were viewed as new, flexible tools that teachers could assess and modify to suit the needs and sensitivities of their classes. For example, some classes responded best to a single newspaper advertisement copied to a page, whereas other higher-level classes dealt well with multiple advertisements per page. Similarly, instructions and stories continuing across multiple pages were an issue for some lower-level students, whereas such formatting stretched higher-level students in ways that they found beneficial rather than daunting. Depending on students' learning levels, enlarging and photocopying an exercise to a single page was an easy adaptation to suit early beginner classes.

Teachers introduced a number of adaptations. In particular, the incorporation of a résumé exercise was very popular with students. Other modifications implemented by teachers included additional surveys and crosswords, more jobs ads and job search tips, and reading the exercises in the Melway directory so that students learned how to work with a street directory.

Teachers who worked together in teams found trialling the package an energising experience, and they were able to use the materials extensively as well as bounce ideas off each other and, in the process, developed many adaptations.

Interestingly, although some teachers initially considered particular activities in the later units as too advanced for their lower-level students, many learned through this trial that they could do things with students much earlier than they had previously thought. For example, the hands-on use of the Touchscreen computer in Unit 4 was both a popular and successful exercise in all classes that undertook it.

These comments suggest that it is possible to address calls from learners for an integration of job-related materials into lower-level classes, provided that this integration is done in ways that reflect the experiences of learners and is supported with relevant and recognisable visuals. Learners were able to explore complex material when it was presented in a manner that made the English transparent and established clear relationships between the concepts that the learners needed to express and the English that was required to express those concepts.

Note

- ¹ *List of clients enrolled and withdrawn for work reasons in period 1/1/03–30/9/03 and not currently assigned.* AMEP Research Centre Management System (ARMS).

References

List of clients enrolled and withdrawn for work reasons in period 1/1/03–30/9/03 and not currently assigned. AMEP Research Centre Management System (ARMS).

Wigglesworth, G. (Ed.) (2003). *The kaleidoscope of adult second language learning: Learner, teacher and researcher perspectives.* Sydney: NCELTR.

Useful resources

Books/tapes*

Beaverson, A., & Carstensen, C. (1985). *Starters dialogues: Dialogues for beginning ESL students.* Adelaide: National Curriculum Resource Centre.

Beaverson, A., & Carstensen, C. (1985). *Starting to listen: Listening exercises for beginning ESL students* (Interviews p. 20). Adelaide: National Curriculum Resource Centre.

Clemens, J., & Crawford, J. (1986). *Lifelines: Integrated audio-visual language materials for new migrants to Australia* (Units 12–15). Adelaide: National Curriculum Resource Centre.

Corbell, C. (1985). *Using the system: Beginning Australian English* (Units 9, 10, 11). Melbourne: AE Press.

Hartley, B., & Viney, P. (1983). *Streamlines: English departures* (Unit 34, What's My Job?). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parnwell, E. C. (1988). *The New Oxford Picture Dictionary* (pp. 84–86). New York: Oxford University Press.

Power, M. (1998). *Passages to English 2* (Units 12, 13, 14, 15). Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia.

Ramm, J. (1992). *Signposts: Access materials for beginning ESL learners*. Melbourne: Curriculum Support Unit, Adult Migrant Education.

Zevin, P. E. (1988). *The New Oxford Picture Dictionary, Beginner's workbook* (p. 109). New York: Oxford University Press.

Computer programs*

Hajnci, L. & Livingstone, J. (2002). *That's life!* CD-ROM. Melbourne: AMES VIC.

The interactive picture dictionary for Windows [electronic resource] / designed, produced and published in Australia by Protea Textware. Hurstbridge, Victoria: Protea Textware, 1999, c1995.

* Some of these resources need to be adapted for use in today's classrooms because of changed job market practices.

Compiled by
Kathy Earp and Carmel Everitt
AMES Victoria
Howard Nicholas and Julie Deblaquiere
AMEP Research Centre
La Trobe University

Contributions from Jill Schofield