

# Teaching strategies – 6

## Working with continuous enrolment

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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 identifying some annotated reference that can be used to broaden knowledge and extend understanding. These references can be obtained through the AMEP Resource Centre at [rescentr@nceltr.mq.edu.au](mailto:rescentr@nceltr.mq.edu.au)

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### Context

Under NEAS Standards and Criteria, Section D, 10.1.b, AMEP providers have to offer clients ‘the opportunity to commence an appropriate formal learning activity within one month of registering with the provider, or three months if they have a childcare entitlement’. Students may choose to wait before they take up this opportunity, but those who wish to start their English language study within one month have the right to do so. This can be a challenge for managers and teachers who must therefore accommodate new arrivals and departures on an ongoing basis. This fact sheet briefly outlines some of the benefits for students and centres of finding ways of working with continuous enrolment, and then explores some of the issues that it presents, and suggests some strategies that can be used to manage it.

### Advantages for students

While newly arrived migrants are often busy settling into a new environment, they can also be very lonely and confused. Many therefore wish to start their English language study straightaway, not only to improve their English, but also to make contact with other human beings, to find a social group, and to learn more about what it is like to live in Australia. Those who have suffered torture or trauma may be particularly keen to start their class as soon as possible as an alternative to sitting at home besieged by unpleasant memories of the past or focused on remembering what they have lost. English classes offer them a way of focusing on their new life in Australia.

Although students can find it daunting to join a class that has already started, the class may also offer a new set of friends to help them settle in and catch up. While they will naturally find that they have missed much of what their classmates know and may not be able to take the same learning outcome assessments at the same time, at least they can feel that they have started. For their part, although new arrivals may be disruptive, students already in the class find it interesting to meet new people, and, because

they themselves have once been in the same position, most are tolerant and appreciate the opportunities that this brings for practising and recycling what has already been taught.

Moreover, centres find that, despite the headache in accommodating new arrivals throughout the term, there are economic advantages in accepting students on an ongoing basis, and that in rural areas in particular, it may be possible to start a class that otherwise would not be viable until requisite numbers are reached.

### Issues

Managing continuous enrolment can be a challenge for managers, administrators, counsellors, and teachers, as well as for the students who arrive in classes that have already started and for the students in classes they join. Many of the issues for these groups may be similar across different types and sizes of centres, although the strategies that might be most effective in addressing them may be different. Continuous enrolment can increase the stresses involved in:

- predicting what classes may be running;
- placing students in the right class level;
- monitoring the progress of individual students;
- dealing with attendance/absence;
- finding childcare;
- completing paperwork for attendance, deferrals and progress;
- incorporating into the class a student who has not covered what the class has covered;
- keeping a stable working atmosphere in a class that is constantly changing;
- managing changing personalities and needs in the class;
- managing the balance between recycling material and tackling new areas;

- managing assessment;
- managing exits from as well as entry to the class.

Below are outlined some of the strategies that can be used at a centre level and in the classroom to address these issues.

## Strategies for working with continuous enrolment

### Strategies at centre level

#### *Holding or new arrivals classes*

Some centres operate a system under which new arrivals do not join mainstream classes, but enter a special class that deals chiefly with language related to on-arrival matters such as orientation, getting prepared for language study, establishing links with agencies etc. The nature of this class and the period after which students enter such a class rather than joining regular classes can vary according to the nature of the clients and their needs. Some centres offer this class as multi-level for all new arrivals, while some make it available only for clients eligible for Special Preparatory Program (SPP) and whose preference is to start to study less intensively. A class of this kind may be set up 4–6 weeks into the normal teaching period, and may be open only for particular certificate levels as appropriate.

A variation on this idea is the *withdrawal class*. Newly arrived students attend this special class some of the time, while their usual classmates continue with their regular classes. In this way they can receive more intense support outside of their class at least some of the time, and this may be particularly appropriate for clients with little previous education or others who need more individual orientation to study. In some centres, students arriving after a certain point in the term are assigned to sessions in an Independent Learning Centre for more individualised attention rather than to a particular class.

An alternative to the holding class for some students for whom this is assessed as appropriate is the opportunity to access distance learning for a certain period until they can join a regular class.

#### *Sensitive placement of new arrivals*

Placing students in a class appropriate to their level and their needs is particularly important once the normal teaching period has already started, in order to minimise distress to both the student and the teacher. For example, it can be useful to place a student:

- in a class just under their current level;
- with a buddy of a similar/higher proficiency;
- with same-language-background peers in the class;
- according to skills, motivations, level of education etc.

Centres can use a range of strategies to minimise disruption to students and teachers. Some of these are briefly outlined below.

#### *Finely graded classes*

In some centres, classes are finely graded according to the entry level of the students in different skills, and this allows students to be placed very accurately with peers at the same level in English so that they do not experience undue stress as they adjust to the work of the class. Under this system, new arrivals may be assigned to any class.

#### *Small number of on-arrival classes*

Other centres seek to minimise disruption to classes by designating only one or two classes at each certificate level as 'on-arrival'. This means that only the teachers and students in these classes face the disruptions of entry under continuous enrolment. If on-arrival classes can be smaller, this is an advantage for both student and teacher.

#### *Staged intakes*

One way of minimising the potential disruption caused by a continuous stream of new arrivals is to decide on some principle under which entry to the centre is restricted to certain days or points in the term. There are various views on when students should arrive:

- only on 1 day per week
- only every 2nd week
- every 4 weeks
- not when there is assessment
- not near end of term (for example, not in the last two weeks)
- not after 5 weeks (when new arrivals go to a holding class).

#### *Short learning modules*

Another idea along these lines is that all learners should be offered learning modules of two weeks. New arrivals could then always wait until the beginning of a module before they start a class. While offering a convenient way to have students start something together, this rapid turnaround of modules may be more appropriate for students with higher levels of education but might be unsettling for some students, especially those who have suffered torture and trauma.

#### *Careful monitoring of new arrivals*

In addition to sensitive placement in classes, it is also crucial that new arrivals are closely monitored to ensure that any changes to class or delivery mode may be made quickly. In some cases, it may be appropriate for students to observe classes before officially joining them so that they and the teacher can gauge how well they would fit in before they actually start.

### *Information and counselling for students*

It is vital that students receive accurate information on a range of topics related to their language study:

- on when they can start;
- on what continuous enrolment is and why we have it;
- advice that they should organise and see to urgent settlement issues before they start to use their hours of language learning if at all possible;
- advice to low-literacy learners that they may be more comfortable in particular classes, eg community venues;
- advice to SPP clients or those with less previous education on which classes may be more suitable.

This information may be given to students in a variety of ways, but it is useful for them to have it as soon as possible. In addition to what is normally done, it may be useful to:

- provide a handbook of relevant information, particularly if it is a language in which they or their associates are proficient readers;
- arrange special information sessions for new arrivals;
- organise a buddy system either in the centre or in the class to which the student is assigned.

## Strategies to support teachers

What the teacher does both inside and outside the classroom is absolutely crucial in managing continuous enrolment successfully. Teachers who are skilled in managing different groups and coping with change are much more likely to have contented students and experience less stress themselves. It is therefore important that centres develop a culture that supports teachers as well as students to understand the contexts and pressures of continuous enrolment, and in which everyone is equipped with the strategies they need to manage it effectively. Good communications, professional development and relevant materials can help foster such a culture.

### *Good communications with and within centres*

Good communications with and within centres are vital. Managers and teachers need to know as soon as possible about any new group of arrivals, and individual teachers need to have information about any new arrival to their class as early as possible. Ideally, they should have this *before* the student arrives. New teachers or those who have previously worked in a system where attendance patterns are less changeable may be in need of particular support.

### *Shared materials and professional development for teachers*

Some teachers seem better able to cope with the stresses of continuous enrolment than others. Where resources and strategies for managing new arrivals are shared, more teachers are likely to feel more comfortable about welcoming new arrivals.

Specific professional development sessions in which teachers can focus on and develop skills in how to manage continuous enrolment in the classroom can help to lower stress levels for teachers and to encourage a culture of welcome for students. Ideas for such sessions include:

- How to share strategies and techniques for managing continuous enrolment more systematically.
- How to cope with discontinuity in learning:
  - discrete topics for each class;
  - getting students to work in teams;
  - how to recycle materials/structures without boring continuing students;
  - how to revisit learning outcomes in creative ways that build on, but do not depend on, previous classes.
- How to organise within a centre to share welcoming/bonding activities that can foster a supportive learning environment:
  - welcoming and introducing activities
    - blank world map

New class members have to locate and mark on a world map the country they come from.

- 'Find someone who ...'

This is a mingling activity in which learners have to find someone who fits each of the criteria listed by the teacher on the board. These can be gathered in secret from the students before the activity by asking them to write something unusual about themselves on a strip of paper and handing it in. The list might include, for example, 'has lived on a mountain', 'has ridden a camel', 'has a twin sister'. By asked question such as 'have you ever...' or 'do you have...' etc., the students must find someone who has done or got each of these things.

- activities to help class bond and maintain cohesion
  - bingo
  - range of other activities (see 'Useful activities').
- How to manage assessment within continuous enrolment:
  - use of the Independent Learning Centre
  - use of an extra teacher one afternoon a week
  - use of breaks for assessment.



7. Play until all the cards are used up.

What did you do today?	What are you going to do tomorrow?
What is your favourite TV program? Why do you like it?	Tell us about what you like to do on the weekend.
Do you like pets? Why or why not?	Who is your favourite person?

Source: Collaboratively devised and produced by teachers from LM Training.

### 3. Spotlight on you

*How to use this activity*

A great game for the newcomer to start learning the other students' names.

14 students (as many as there are questions on the games sheet) and the new student are given a games sheet. The other students listen.

In turn, each student with a games sheet asks the newcomer a question and remembers the answer. The new student has to ask for the name of the person who asked the question and record it.

Participants can then repeat their information to the class.

## Useful references

The following references contain activities that teachers may find useful to help foster a supportive classroom atmosphere conducive to welcoming new students on a continuous basis:

Kay, Susan, & The Lake School of English (1999a). *Reward, Intermediate Resource Pack: Communicative activities for students of English, Speaking* (Worksheet 4). Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching.

Kay, Susan, & The Lake School of English (1999b). *Reward, Intermediate Resource Pack: Communicative activities for students of English, Speaking* (Worksheet 1a). Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching. Also downloadable from <http://www.reward-english.com/PDF/int/prog1-5/1GRA-spotlightonyouWS-p8.pdf>, accessed 30/10/06.

Macmillan Education Resource website, <http://www.reward-english.com/>, accessed 30/10/06.

This website offers a range of free downloadable teaching materials.

Marsland, Bruce (1998). *Lessons from nothing: Activities for language teachers with limited time and resources*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Molinsky, S. J., and Bliss, B. (2001). *Side by side*. Book 1. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Power, Maggie (1996). *Oxford Surveys*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Wacyn-Jones, Peter (2002). *Pair Work 2: Intermediate-Upper Intermediate*, New Edition. Harlow: Penguin Books and Pearson Education Limited.

Wacyn-Jones, Peter (2002). *Vocabulary 2: Games and activities*. Harlow, UK: Penguin Books.

Wacyn-Jones, Peter (1993). *Vocabulary games and activities for teachers*. London: Penguin Books.

Other books by this same author may also be useful.

**1a Spotlight on you**

Reward Intermediate Resource Pack



QUESTIONS FOR (Name)	QUESTIONS ASKED BY (Name)
What's your favourite... ?	
Have you ever... ?	
Where do you usually... ?	
Are you... ?	
Do you have... ?	
Do you... ?	
How old... ?	
What are you going to... ?	
When did you... ?	
Do you think you'll... ?	
Would you like to... ?	



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Source: Susan Kay and The Lake School of English (1999b).

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