This report is the result of a research project looking at the learning characteristics of clients with special needs within the AMEP, at the factors which would enhance their learning gains and at what might constitute achievable learning gains.

The report identifies:
- the kinds of learners who may be expected to encounter difficulties with classroom-based learning
- the learning characteristics of learners in these categories
- learning arrangements which most effectively support the language learning program
- appropriate learning goals and language outcomes achievable within the 510 hour entitlement period

The report draws on the knowledge and professional expertise of teachers in the AMEP who have developed an awareness and understanding of these learners' special needs and a comprehensive range of strategies to support them. This makes the report of particular interest to classroom teachers who work with learners with special needs.

Other titles in the series are:

1 Language Audits and Industry Restructuring
   Giselle Mawer, 1991

2 Computer-enhanced Language Assessment
   Chris Corbel, 1993

3 Teachers Interactive Decision Making
   David Nunan, 1993

4 Learner Pathways in the Adult Migrant English Program
   Lilli Lipa, 1993

5 Non-language Outcomes in the Adult Migrant English Program
   Elaine Jackson, 1994

6 From Proficiency to Competencies: A Collaborative Approach to Curriculum Innovation
   Youle Bottomley, Jeanette Dalton and Chris Corbel, 1994

7 The Process Syllabus in Action
   Diana Simmons and Sylvia Wheeler, 1995

8 The Computing Practices of Language and Literacy Teachers
   Chris Corbel, 1996

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Investigating Learner Outcomes

for Clients with Special Needs in the

Adult Migrant English Program

Pam McPherson
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I would like to convey my gratitude to the AMEP teachers in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia who generously contributed their time and expertise to this project, demonstrating their professional commitment to assisting students who have special learning needs. I would also like to thank Sue Hood (formerly Coordinator: Educational Research and Resources, NSW AMES) and Dr Ken Willing (Senior Lecturer and Assistant Coordinator, Research) National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, for their extensive support and encouragement.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Through its competency-based curriculum, the settlement program of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) offers English language and literacy training to a wide variety of adult learners from vastly differing cultural, experiential and educational backgrounds. Clients in the AMEP include students who display one or more of the following characteristics (Jackson 1994:1), which have been shown to have an effect on formal language learning:

- have no formal education background
- have limited formal education background (ie less than seven years)
- have no experience of formal learning as adults
- have disrupted education due to war or other political crises
- are functionally illiterate in their first language (L1)
- are from non-roman script backgrounds
- are elderly
- are suffering severe effects of political torture and trauma
- have cultural backgrounds and educational perspectives significantly different from those of Anglo-Australian culture

In the AMEP these learners are acknowledged as having special needs. These needs are seen as indicators for instructional provision which takes into account the characteristics of the learner, and provides assistance with developing the kinds of learning strategies and skills which will facilitate participation in the community and access to further education and training.

The AMEP language and literacy providers — AMES Victoria, NSW AMES and AMES ELLS South Australia — provide learner pathways for clients in which language development proceeds at a level and pace appropriate to the needs and goals of the individual learner. The concept of learner pathways is based on an understanding of the disparate needs of clients who have a wide range of cultural, language and educational backgrounds, but have similar goals of access to further education, employment and community services. Learners are offered a number of course options which vary in length, learning pace, intensity and delivery modes according to individual learner’s needs, goals and previous educational experiences. Figure 1 summarises the major pathways offered to clients of the AMEP.
Investigating learner outcomes for clients with special needs in the AMEP

Figure 1: Curriculum structure (from: Certificates in Spoken and Written English I and II, 1996. Sydney NSW Adult Migrant English Program: 11)
Band A students

Band A is the pathways descriptor for slower-paced courses designed for clients with low levels of formal education (ie less than seven years). It recognises that learners who have had limited experience of formal learning, and consequently have low levels of literacy in their first language, need to develop classroom-based language learning and literacy practices in order to access further education and training. There is evidence, however, that learners with different characteristics to those defined by the descriptor are also assigned to Band A classes in order to accommodate their special learning needs.

The research project described in this report was undertaken to study the characteristics and the needs of those Band A learners who do not fit neatly into the descriptor ‘less than seven years formal education.’

Aims of the project

The aims of this project were to identify:

• the learning characteristics of clients with special needs who are typically found in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) Band A classes
• the factors which might enhance the ability of these clients to optimise learning gains over their period of entitlement within the AMEP
• the learning gains which are achievable for these clients within their period of entitlement in the AMEP.

Methodology

The following five methods were employed to gather data for this research:

• a review of the relevant literature
• teacher survey/interviews
• a case study
• learner interviews
• an analysis of the learner characteristics and language outcomes of a group of Band A learners who exited the AMEP in 1995.

The literature review is presented in this chapter. The results of the investigations into the other four areas are reported in chapters 2–5. Chapter 6 contains a summary of the research findings.

Literature review

The literature review identified a number of research reports and journal articles which have investigated the needs of learners with the
characteristics frequently found in Band A classes. These profiles of learners include:

- **Aged learners**: Byrne, 1985; Er, 1986; Aggarwal 1985; Lipa 1987; Green and Piperis 1987; Singleton 1989; Long 1990; Scott 1994

**Low literacy in L1**

Migrants and refugees who have very recently arrived in Australia may not be immediately aware of the central role that literacy has in this society. However, it is essential that they be assisted to develop functional literacy skills that will allow them to interact in ways that are appropriate to the socio-cultural context. Learners who have lower levels of education; who come from cultural groups which place a different premium on literacy, or those who come from countries where the education system was disrupted by war or political upheaval frequently have low levels of literacy in their first language and have not developed the formal learning skills which are developed through formal schooling over a long period of time. The development of literacy, further education and industry training in Australia are all contingent upon these formal learning skills.

Khoe and Kightley’s (1986) description of a course for Hmong refugees documents an approach to teaching learners who are not literate in their first language. The course focused strongly on first developing oral language related to events and actions within the learners’ own personal experience.

The authors (p 17) say that the students found it difficult to discuss generalised topics such as Hmong customs, but were able to cope with language related to their daily lives:

*Students were better able to cope with language that related directly to their own lives. The least successful section was that on Hmong legend.*

*We felt this was because the language was too difficult and the topic too far removed from everyday life.*

The teaching methodology included a focus on the students’ personal and cultural background, a decentralised, facilitative role for the teacher, and
regular visits (for conversation practice) by native-English speaking community groups. Khoe and Kightley also regard bilingual assistance as essential to the success of the course.

Huntington's (1992) description of a literacy class for pre-literate adult Hmong refugees documents a two-year literacy program based on a language experience approach to teaching reading and writing. Like Khoe and Kightley she asserts that their limited experience with formal schooling created a need to develop special conditions and teaching methods, and an increased length of instruction time.

Hood (1990) and Hood and Khoe (1990) outline a process for developing literacy skills in beginner learners who are illiterate in L1. In their view it is essential to begin with oral language that is cognitively undemanding, and also closely tied to real events and actions that are familiar to learners. Hood (1990) draws on the findings of Heath (1983) who investigated literacy practices in several communities in the US. Heath found that literacy activities in the home and community of one group were usually instrumental and context-dependent. Hood reasons that if the language of the classroom and formal learning relies on decontextualised language, then learners who are not literate in L1 are disadvantaged in learning in that environment. She refers to Cummins' 'Construct of Context Dependency and Cognitive Demand' (Cummins and Swain 1989) which has a horizontal continuum extending from context-embedded communication to context-reduced. A vertical axis describes the level of difficulty from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding. Hood says that adult learners illiterate in L1 are proficient in context-embedded uses of oral language, and in cognitively demanding and non-demanding contexts. She claims that in the classroom it is often context-reduced language which is offered as input. Hood describes a process for developing literacy in which contexts are introduced which gradually draw the learner away from the highly concrete and familiar (context-embedded) and lead them towards texts within familiar fields but which begin to introduce new functions of language.

Hood and Kightley (1991) tracked the development of literacy in a longitudinal study of six beginner learners of English. Three of the six were not literate in their first language and had minimal or no education in their own country. The authors examined samples of oral and written language and followed their literacy development over a 12-month period. Their findings show that for literacy development to occur for people who are illiterate in their first language, it is essential that they be introduced to written texts in a context 'in which there is a very close connection to familiar, concrete, real world events and concern' (p 58).

They question the practice of introducing abstract notions such as alphabet and decontextualised written words as preliminary steps towards literacy in English, and the use of written worksheets to support oral language development. They also suggest that language goals be based on community access goals where language development occurs within a framework of action and involvement rather than in the abstracted forum of a classroom, and that such a model of provision could be conducted jointly with community groups.
Achren (1991, 1994) draws attention to the widespread use of abstract graphic representation as a learning tool to reinforce language, to aid its acquisition and to allow practice in a realistic context in language learning. She points out that abstract graphic representation, for example maps or aerial view diagrams, are literacy activities beyond the experience of many learners who are not literate in their first language. Paradoxically, their use as a learning tool creates a stumbling block for these learners and instead of being an aid, they create a barrier to the learning activity. However, she believes that to discontinue the use of graphic representation in learning would:

- hinder the learners’ progress in negotiating daily life in Australia where the recognition of graphic representation is widely taken for granted
- limit the development of autonomous learning through self-access materials.

Rather, she recommends the integration of aspects of graphic representation, such as aerial view representations, into the language and literacy learning program in order to build up the concepts needed for literacy activities such as reading maps and using street directories. She describes a spiral learning sequence which begins with the concrete experiences of the learners and slowly develops the concepts at more complex and demanding levels.

Ramm’s (1994) article on designing teaching materials for learners with minimal formal education also views diagrammatic representation as a literacy activity. She advises using real objects to set a meaningful context for language points being taught, then later replacing them by photos or realistic pictures. Later again, diagrams or graphics can be used. ‘In this way students gradually move from using only concrete objects to an understanding of abstract diagrams’. In addition, she points out (p1) that diagrammatic representations such as line drawings should be used with great care with learners:

> All graphics should be simple without any unnecessary items in the background, as these might divert the learners’ attention from the main focus of the picture. However there should be enough detail to make the context clear.

The shared cultural knowledge we use to decode the meanings depicted in drawings and other visual representations may not yet be accessible to the learner and an absence of highly explicit contextual clues makes the pictures difficult to recognise.

**Educational background**

Juriansz (1989) considers the ways in which meaning is carried in language and the role that cultural experience plays in mediating the meanings imbued in language learning materials and activities presented in the classroom. He describes how elements of our Western culture are reflected in our formal learning practices, and considers ways that they may seem to be alien to the previous non-western cultural and educational experiences of learners in the AMEP.
Khoe and Kightley (1986) and Huntington (1992) describe the difficulties which learners from a remote rural society face with classroom learning in an industrialised society. Their geographic isolation in their own country, their unfamiliarity with literacy and numeracy and the informal nature of their acquired learning skills require the development of specialised teaching practices to help develop learning skills for oral language and literacy.

Badenhorst (1989, 1994) and Hajncl (1989, 1994) investigated the ways in which teaching strategies and materials could be adapted to meet the needs of learners with a low education background. Both reported that their classes followed the same curriculum as a high education class operating at the same time, but covered significantly less in terms of vocabulary, language and topics. They attribute the difference to the fact that the low education class had a different starting point because they had no prior knowledge of how to manage information input, or use information processing skills.

Badenhorst reported that her class had difficulty with organising learning materials, were distressed by error and by failure to recall learned language, had difficulty processing large chunks of new language and did not employ the same independent mnemonic devices that the high education group used. They had difficulty in following verbal instructions and written instructions for activities and this caused great difficulties for her students.

The author found that these learners responded well to an informal environment with ‘lots of talk and interaction’ (Badenhorst 1994: 73) She believes that these learners need to develop skills for formal classroom learning which involve memorising and categorising, and the use of reference tools such as the dictionary for independent language learning. They must also be taught to organise their own learning and to evaluate their own performance.

Hajncl held weekly evaluation and consultation skills using bilingual assistance in which the teacher and students discussed and evaluated the teaching and learning strategies used.

She suggests an ‘orientation to learning’ course to introduce learners to the formal learning skills required to access mainstream language classes. She sees this as ‘a means of integrating low education background learners into mainstream classes so that their ongoing English language learning will be a positive and successful experience’ (p82) and suggests elements or features of such a course.

Ramm (1992) investigated the learning styles of Band A clients in order to determine some principles for teaching learners with little experience of formal learning. Her study involved:

- a comparison of language gains of learners with minimal formal education in three different learning arrangements over a two-year period;
- interviews with students, and
interviews with AMES Victoria teachers experienced in teaching informal learners.

The language gains were greatest in the class for young learners where the content and methodology had been designed specifically to meet those students’ needs. The student interviews confirmed their preference for language learning activities related to their own experiences and lives. The teachers recommended placing students in classes according to their level of education and establishing a methodology for developing the students’ formal learning skills as they learnt English. They recommended (p25) that teachers:

*start with concrete learning set in the immediate context and to gradually lead the students towards decontextualised language.*

They emphasised the need for:

- determining the skills involved in each activity
- explicit teaching of the transfer of skills
- carefully graded and sequenced small steps
- constant recycling of language and skills, the inclusion of physical activities and frequent change of activities.

Achren (1991, 1994) looked at the use of graphic representation in language learning materials in the classroom and found that learners with a low educational background were disadvantaged in classes where the learning activities assumed an understanding of concepts of abstract graphic representation. Achren (1994), Ramm (1994) and Duffy (1995) acknowledge the cultural understandings that underlie visual images in classroom language learning materials, and describe strategies to develop learners’ ability to draw meaning from visual images and diagrammatic representations.

Ramm (1992, 1994) suggests that many learners from low education background have difficulty with reading and writing and that teachers should be fully aware of the literacy skills embedded in language learning materials. She looks at a range of diagrammatic texts which are frequently used in classrooms as tools for language learning. She then describes a learning sequence which introduces learners to a range of these kinds of texts and shows how the kinds of interactions that these texts demand can be explicitly taught.

The sequence begins with simple activities based on concrete materials. It then leads to the more complex literacy demands of interacting with a range of differently formatted diagrammatic texts, for example, crossword puzzles, diagrams with numbered parts, and surveys and questionnaires in a variety of formats.

In her study of non-language outcomes in the AMEP, Jackson (1993, 1994) found that all of the teachers she surveyed agreed that learners in the AMEP make gains other than increases in language and literacy. She found eight major categories of non-language outcomes cited by teachers as being significant for learners. The teachers described these outcomes as being a
precondition or prerequisite for learning. Learning skills were rated highly by teachers and included study management techniques, problem-solving and learning strategies, and knowledge and understanding of the formal learning environment and processes. While more than half the teachers surveyed found the eight categories of non-language outcomes to be as significant to learner achievement as language gains, Jackson found it was the interrelationships between these outcomes that were essential to their impact on the learning process.

While a slower pace of learning and lower intensity classes are generally recognised as essential features for learners with no schooling, Hood (1990) and Hood and Kightley (1991) emphasise the need for an effective pedagogy for teaching literacy to learners who are not literate in their first language. They argue, as do Ramm (1992), Achren (1994), Badenhorst (1994) and Hajncl (1994), that teaching practices that focus on the development of formal learning strategies within a highly contextualised framework are crucial to the development of literacy.

Aged learners

The 1991 New South Wales Census revealed that 34 per cent of adults aged 55-64 and 42 per cent of the age group 65 or more described their ability to speak English as ‘not well’ or ‘not at all’ (EAC 1994).

Byrne (1985) cites a report by the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs which documents the isolation and loneliness of ethnic aged in Australia. The report recommended that the elderly have the opportunity to learn English in order to decrease their isolation, facilitate their access to services, and allow them to participate more effectively in the Australian community.

Reports on negative effects of age on second language acquisition and learning have been based on auditory perception, language-memory and grammar-skill memory tests. (Singleton 1989, Long 1990, Scott 1994). Singleton (1989:70) reports that, given the evidence of often only marginal memory impairment with age:

\[
\text{this may suggest that even in senescence the language learning capacity is maintained unimpaired at least in some individuals.}
\]

Scott’s studies show that the ability to learn a second language is not necessarily inhibited by neurological change in the maturation process and that older learners perform comparatively with younger learners, and he reports (1994: 278):

\[
\text{Older adults who are healthy and mentally alert possess auditory memory capacities similar to younger adults.}
\]

While it is doubtless the case that physiological and socio-cultural variables such as hearing acuity are statistically more likely to affect performance and progress in the older learner, the effects of these factors can very likely be compensated for under appropriate learning conditions.
In her survey of the English language learning needs of elderly illiterate ethnic Chinese migrants, Er (1986) found that their learning problems were possibly a cumulative combination of age, educational background or socio-cultural factors. She outlines a methodology which takes into account their reduced perceptual acuity, psychomotor coordination, energy and general health levels. She advocates a slow pace of instruction, introducing new knowledge which is consistent with the learners’ previous experience, and concrete learning tasks which are relevant to the learners’ experience. She also suggests using the learners’ various sensory modalities to vary the learning pathways and provide repetition at increasingly deeper levels. Aggarwal (1985) also describes a course designed to meet the needs of older learners which incorporates the use of themes relevant to their daily needs, a slow pace of learning and constant reinforcement. The course achieved its aims of increasing the students’ confidence and ability to use English. She found that the results indicated that given the right learning environment, elderly people are ‘more than capable of making progress’ (p 11).

Green and Piperis (1987) undertook an action research project with the following aims: to identify the learning difficulties faced by older learners, to investigate means of overcoming age-related learning deficits and to develop appropriate and effective teaching methods and materials for the ‘slow’ elderly second language learners of various ethnic origins. The learners varied in their levels of education, country of birth, and length of residence in Australia, and the age range was 46–80 years. Their findings included:

- Teaching staff should be genuinely interested in learners’ needs and have a positive attitude to their learning.
- Physical conditions (lighting, temperature, acoustics, seating) should be the best possible.
- Anxiety is reduced by creating a supportive classroom where learners and students are comfortable with each other.
- Emphasis on receptive rather than productive skills reduces tension.
- A methodology should be based on highly contextualised language relevant to the learners’ immediate personal experiences, familiar and meaningful topics, themes and materials, and a learning pace based on realistic expectations.

**Literature on refugees and survivors of torture and trauma**

The data on the learner sample described in the Analysis of the Database show that of the 209 learners who exited the AMEP in NSW, 43 per cent arrived in Australia through the humanitarian program.

Cunningham, Silove and Storm (1990) maintain that a substantial number of refugees arriving in Australia are the victims of torture and other forms of organised violence. They state (p 502) that:

> torture survivors are almost all refugees who have suffered traumata before and after arriving in this country... after arriving in Australia they confront linguistic, occupational, financial, educational and cultural obstacles.
They provide an overview of the broad range of physical and emotional disabilities that arise from the survivors’ experiences:

Those who survive torture are often damaged in body and spirit. Physical sequelae are often multiple in nature and include chronic pain syndromes, non union or malunion of fractures, arthritis and injuries to eyes, teeth, ears, genitalia, rectum, reproductive organs and skin. Brain damage is common and often undiagnosed while survivors are vulnerable to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and other disorders that result from crowding, starvation and exposure to extreme conditions of heat and cold.

Psychological symptoms are often the most distressing and chronic. These include guilt, shame, suicidal tendencies, severe anxiety with phobic avoidance, depression, irritability, sleep disturbance, nightmares, impaired concentration and memory, sexual dysfunction, impaired impulse control, and alcohol abuse. Many survivors suffer symptoms of the post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) which is now recognised as a common consequence of life threatening stress.

Herman (1992) argues that the diagnostic formulation of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is derived from observations of survivors of relatively circumscribed traumatic events such as combat, disaster and rape. She says (p 377) that this formulation:

fails to acknowledge the sequelae of prolonged, repeated trauma which occurs only where the victim is in a state of captivity, unable to flee and under the control of the perpetrator.

She identifies the following three broad areas of disturbance which transcend simple PTSD and are characteristic of complex PTSD which occurs in survivors of prolonged trauma:

- more complex, diffuse and tenacious symptomatology
- personality changes including deformations of relatedness and identity
- the survivors’ vulnerability to repeated harm, both self-inflicted and at the hands of others.

The symptoms she describes as characteristic of complex PTSD include:

- **Somatisation** — tension, headaches, gastro-intestinal disturbance, abdominal, back and pelvic pain, tremors, choking sensations or nausea
- **Dissociation** — voluntary thought suppression or minimisation, outright denial, trance capabilities, disturbances in time, sense, memory and concentration
- **Pathological changes in relationship** — passivity, helplessness, a learned understanding that independent action carries the risk of dire punishment
- **Pathological changes in identity** — loss of a sense of self, fragmentation of the sense of self, guilt
- **Repetition of harm** — intrusive memories, reliving experiences, behavioural re-enactments of the trauma, self-mutilation, repeated victimisation
In a survey of the needs of refugee women in their first two years of settlement in Sydney, Pittaway (1991) interviewed 204 refugee women, two-thirds of whom were survivors of severe torture and trauma. Commenting on the provision of services to this group, Pittaway says that although refugees have specific needs additional to those of other immigrants, they are often treated as one group.

Of the women surveyed, 98 per cent identified English as their priority need. However, they also felt that the acquisition of English and the provision of classes adequate to their needs were a problematic issue. The limit to the hours of instruction and the period in which entitlement must be used were seen as barriers to their acquisition of English, and they said bilingual classes are essential. They reported (p 42):

Fifty-three per cent of the women commented that had the teacher been able to speak their language, they thought that they would have been able to learn more English.

Pittaway identified the classroom learning needs of refugee women who:

- had low levels of education
- came from rural backgrounds
- were over 40 years of age.

She calls for teachers who are trained in using techniques sensitive to the special needs of survivors of torture. Some of the women in her survey commented that some commonly-used teaching techniques in Australia had resulted in them reliving distressing incidents related to their previous experiences of torture.

Pittaway also recommended that orientation information should be given bilingually and that it should be recognised that these women may be less able to assimilate information than other refugees. ‘They may require additional information and orientation services given by empathic service providers’ (p 54).

Beck (1991) says that refugees arrive in Australia with nothing: ‘no finances, housing, work or language’. She describes language as an essential element to settlement. ‘It is through language that inroads are made into the new society, problems solved and directions found’ (p 3).

Bekar (1994) asks the question: ‘As language is so integral to the whole state of being, how then does the act of torture which seeks to destroy the self affect the learning of languages?’ (p 2). She investigates the effects of torture survival on second language learning (among survivors of torture), focusing on these socio-psychological factors in second language learning, motivation to learn; attitudes towards the target language; and self esteem of the learner.

She suggests (p 13) that the psychological sequelae experienced by victims can frequently work to negatively affect and even override motivational factors. The symptoms of PTSD, including memory impairment, short attention span and limited concentration have impeded the progress of learners in second language learning.

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She cites negative attitudes towards the host culture and language if settlement is difficult, experiences of racism and discrimination, and a sense of resettlement as a ‘temporary’ solution as attitudes which affect learning of the host culture’s language.

Bekar rates self esteem as ‘a necessary component to success’ in second language acquisition and notes that, ‘because the goal of torture is to destroy any sense of identity, then rebuilding self-esteem…is….the cornerstone of the ESL program’ (p 20). She lists the characteristics of her teaching program which assisted this process:

- classes are very informal and comfortable
- students are not prohibited from coming and going within the period of instruction if they feel they need a break
- learning activities are of a non-academic nature

Elaine Parks of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture relates the symptoms of PTSD to difficulties which complicate the survivors’ task of learning the target language. (Parks undated) She contends that a language program that is specifically devised to meet the requirements of the torture survivor could minimise the effects of the ‘learning roadblocks’. She recommends:

- class sizes of around 10 students
- a quiet and pleasant learning environment
- a (trained) volunteer component
- outreach: to encourage new students to come to class
- a curriculum that relates language to the immediate needs of the learners in accessing community services.

She stresses the need for instructors to be sensitive to themes and issues which could provoke painful memories such as family topics, or personal information questions. Clients may also be unwilling to talk about their immediate past or take part in discussions about history, politics or religion.

However, she also says that classes can be an ‘oasis of hope’ for survivors because it will possibly be one of the few social environments where they are not isolated because of their torture experiences. Other students may possibly have suffered similarly and be trying to overcome its effects.

Lee (1988), Welaratna (1988) and Stone (1995) note that the effect that symptoms of PTSD have on the second language learning of survivors of torture and trauma differ according to the survivor’s culture. Stone believes it is important for teachers to understand these cultural variations. While acknowledging that teachers are not therapists he outlines the ways in which teachers can provide conditions for learning which support and encourage the language learning process.

In an address to AMEP providers Aristotle (1996) outlined a support program for teachers of survivors of torture and trauma which operates in
AMES Victoria, and specified core recovery processes and methods applicable to the classroom.

Summary

A survey of current literature shows that adult learners with some or all of the characteristics described above are recognised by teachers and researchers as having special learning needs. There is agreement among the authors that learners with very low levels of oracy and literacy and with no previous education experience are helped greatly by the provision of bilingual assistance within their classes. Courses that introduce language firmly grounded in the concrete experiences of the learners, which are based on real-life tasks and the settlement needs of learners, and which proceed in carefully graduated, achievable steps have been documented as producing both language and non-language gains for the learners.

Teachers/researchers assert that few assumptions can be made about the previous acquisition of independent learning skills by learners, and have developed programs which have as their aim the gradual development of formal learning skills.

Refugees and survivors of torture and trauma may have different or additional learning profiles. As documented above, they have special learning requirements which need to be considered in order to facilitate the language learning that will contribute to their settlement in Australia. Teaching methods which are designed to build confidence, increase success and to meet immediate settlement needs can help to decrease anxiety about learning. The classroom environment is also important as these learners need quiet, comfortable and relaxing surroundings. Psychologists, researchers and the learners themselves emphasise the need for teachers to be aware of the kinds of activities which can cause distressing reactions. All these groups call for teachers to be trained in an awareness of the particular learning needs of refugees.
Chapter 2

Teacher working group and survey

A panel of teachers, described in this report as the ‘Teachers’ Working Group’, was convened in New South Wales to broadly define issues relating to Band A classes. These discussions helped to define the broad focus areas of the teacher survey and to inform the design. After the survey was carried out and the data collated, the panel met again to discuss the implications of the learner characteristics which emerged from the survey and to suggest some elements of a teaching model for the various learner groups (see Appendix 4).

The survey questionnaire, which appears in Appendix 1, consisted of a set of questions delivered to approximately 80 teachers in individual and small group interviews. While most of the surveys were undertaken in New South Wales, teachers from South Australia and Victoria contributed significant and explicit detail on the characteristics of learners with special needs, and clearly articulated their recommendations for appropriate provision and realistic outcomes.

The purpose of the teacher survey was to provide qualitative information about the characteristics of learners with special needs, their learning needs, and the ways in which both language and non-language outcomes support the settlement process. Its design and delivery mode allowed the fullest possible response, and the greatest possible number of responses to the questions. It was considered that written responses by the teachers would limit the extent to which teachers could provide full and comprehensive responses within a reasonable time frame, so the survey questionnaire was completed by the interviewer during the interviews.

All of the teachers surveyed had extensive experience in teaching classes of learners with special needs and affirmed a particular interest in this learner group. At the time of the survey interviews one teacher from South Australia and three teachers from New South Wales were teaching classes of students who were survivors of torture and trauma.

Not all questions were relevant to the wide range of teaching contexts represented among the teachers surveyed, for example, not all learning centres are able to group learners by Band, and so the numbers of responses to each of the questions varies. In order to provide some kind of quantitative analysis of the responses, percentages were calculated separately for each question based on the number of responses to each one.
Appendix 2 ‘Summary of responses’ provides a brief overview of respondent answers. For some of the more open-ended questions, many responses, while closely related, were expressed in different semantic terms, and these have been paraphrased and placed into categories of similar meaning. Responses within one question have then been ordered in percentage rates expressing frequency of response per question.

Results and findings of survey

The survey questions explored the following areas:

- class placement
- learner profiles and characteristics
- aspects of course provision
- course outcomes.

Class placement

Question 1: What factors contribute to the placement of learners in Band A classes?

(a) at assessment

Most teachers provided information about the profiles of learners who could be identified as having special learning needs. From the centres where learners are grouped by Band, when placing students initially assessors consider:

- learner profiles
- learners’ performance of assessment tasks
- indicators based on individual needs of the learner.

The most frequently mentioned learner profiles were:

- age
- low education background,
- survivor of torture and trauma
- low literacy in L1 or in English
- non-roman script background.

Many teachers pointed out that although learner profiles were indicators which were taken into consideration at initial assessment, performance on the assessment tasks tended to override profiles and other factors, such as health or physical impairment and availability of child-care. The number of students in classes, was often the final deciding factor.

In smaller centres, where there are not enough learners to form classes based on the learner profiles indicated by the descriptors for Band A, B and C, learners with widely disparate needs are grouped in a class on the basis of language competency and common learning goals related to community
access. Teachers in Victoria described this as a particular feature of 'community classes'. Community classes are often developed to meet the needs of learners in particular geographic areas who are less able to gain access to classes at larger central learning centres. They are a form of 'customised' provision for a particular community of learners, and have a community access focus centred on the learners’ own immediate locality.

The teachers’ working group pointed out the difficulties of identifying survivors of torture and trauma at the initial interview in order to define their needs. Indicators such as visa sub-class, country of origin and general health are often used as a guide and are taken into consideration along with other factors such as general demeanour in the interview situation and performance of tasks. These teachers suggested that the indicators are often more observable over time by the class teacher, and that in many cases learners confide in the teacher and explicitly describe their experiences to them in order to explain the source of their learning difficulties.

(b) at re-enrolment or re-assignment

This question was based on the practice at some learning centres of allowing transfers from class to class in the early weeks of a course. It recognises that learners are often assigned to Band B or C on the basis of their previous education, but re-assigned to Band A either part-way through or at the end of their first course. All teachers who answered this question said learners were re-assigned because they had a slower learning pace than their current class demanded, and that they had not developed the learning strategies that would allow them to take control of their own learning. A lack of effective learning strategies was indicated by strong reliance on translation/interpretation by classmates, copying classmates’ work, and an unusual degree of dependence on the teacher. These indicators were frequently accompanied by frustration, anxiety, high stress levels, and distress in the learners.

Indicators of the possible existence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) syndrome in the learner were also cited as a reason for re-assignment to Band A. Examples given of these indicators were:

- impaired memory
- difficulty with concentration
- anxiety
- hyperactivity
- sleepiness
- nervousness
- distress
- isolation
- erratic attendance
- erratic performance on learning activities.

Teachers said that learners whose learning appeared to be affected by symptoms of PTSD, or who had identified themselves as being survivors of
torture and trauma and as having learning difficulties, were considered to have special needs. Re-assignment to Band A classes was based on the assumption that the slower pace, strong teacher support and low pressure, which are features of course provision in Band A classes, better supported their classroom needs.

**Question 2: What learning arrangements do you think are most appropriate to the learning needs of Band A students?**

All teachers indicated a preference for class sizes of 10–15, with 15 an absolute maximum. The teachers cited the highly individualised nature of teaching in Band A classes as a rationale for smaller classes, particularly for:

- learners with low educational background who are not literate in L1 and have not yet developed formal learning strategies
- learners who have difficulty with roman script
- learners whose literacy is not commensurate with their oracy
- learners who are suffering the effects of PTSD syndrome.

There were two responses to the question of course intensity, based on education and other considerations. Ninety-one per cent of teachers favoured part-time courses of up to 15 hours per week on the basis that some of the characteristics of Band A learners mean that they are unable to maintain concentration for long periods of time and therefore need shorter teaching sessions. Learners who attend part time classes of up to 15 hours per week extend their access to the AMEP over a longer period, which allows more time to consolidate learning gains.

Nine per cent of teachers asserted that learners who have not yet developed strategies for independent or autonomous learning need more in-class time to consolidate learning gains and to accommodate the frequent recycling and repetition needed to overcome the effects of impaired memory and reduced concentration levels.

**Learner profiles**

**Question 3: In your current/most recent Band A class, approximately what percentage of learners would belong to the following categories?**

(a) less than 7 years of education
(b) non-roman script background
(c) refugee/ torture-trauma survivor background
(d) aged

Less than 50 per cent of the teachers interviewed were able to quantify the numbers of learners by learner profile in current classes in their centre for the following reasons:

- not currently teaching a Band A class
- learners are not grouped by Band in the centre
- learners frequently fit into several categories.
The teachers who did respond agreed with those unable to respond that some learners belong to more than one profile and that this made quantification of learners profiles difficult for the class teachers. Some of those unable to calculate precise figures were able to indicate whether or not these learner profiles were represented in their class. The most frequently appearing learner profiles in current Band A classes surveyed were:

- refugee/torture-trauma background
- non-roman script in L1
- low education background.

Aged learners were most frequently cited as being lowest in number in the class.

**Question 4: What are the learning characteristics of students with these profiles?**

The characteristics teachers commonly encountered in the learner profiles in Band A classes are listed in Appendix 3. Some characteristics were frequently observed in certain learner profiles by most of the teachers surveyed and this is conveyed by listing the items in order of frequency of citation. No other significance is implied by this order; rather the list shows the extent and range of characteristics named by survey respondents.

**Question 5: Would you say these learner profile groups had similar learning characteristics and/or needs?**

Eighty percent of teachers reported that there are significant differences in the learning needs and characteristics of the learner profile groups cited in Question 3. Survivors of torture and trauma were particularly noted as needing:

- high levels of professional support beyond the scope of the teachers’ educational responsibility, such as PTSD counselling
- specialised course provision and a teaching approach which acknowledges and addresses the effects of PTSD on learning.

Teachers who saw some similarities in learning needs across the different profiles noted similar needs in the areas of:

- limited language content
- slow pace
- development of formal language learning skills/strategies.

**Course provision**

**Question 6 (a): How relevant/important are the following as course goals for Band A classes?**

- community access
- development of learning strategies
- language outcomes
Of the teachers interviewed, 74 per cent cited community access and development of learning strategies as their priorities. Some teachers noted that the development of learning strategies is a more relevant goal for learners with limited experience of formal education than for learners with more than seven years education.

**Question 6(b): Are there any other course goals that are equally important?**

Eighty per cent of teachers also included and rated highly the importance of the non-language goal of developing confidence as learners.

**Question 7. Do you think community access goals contribute to the settlement process for students? In what ways?**

Ninety-nine percent of teachers felt the community access goals of the class played a very important part in the settlement process for learners. They said AMES classes contributed in the following ways:

- introduced students to a range of support services
- introduced students to community facilities
- provided language instruction in the context of using these services
- provided assistance and support with accessing services.

**Question 8. How do you take Band A learner characteristics into consideration in course planning and delivery?**

**Content**

Sixty-five percent of responses cited their choice of content as survival or social language with a community access focus, but said the amount of language content was limited in comparison with Band B and C at the same level.

**Materials**

Seventy-two percent placed a great deal of importance on the type of teaching materials used. The materials for special needs classes were characterised as:

- teacher-prepared rather than commercial
- carefully edited to limit range of variables (eg font, upper/lower case)
- extensive use of OHTs
- visual, pictorial
- concrete
- action based
- games.

Most teachers commented on the great demands of materials preparation for these classes and insisted they required much greater care with layout, design and content than materials for ‘mainstream’ classes.

**Teaching strategies**

All respondents mentioned some or all of the following among their teaching strategies:
short lessons, quick activities
frequent breaks
simple tasks, clear instructions
frequent revision, recycling
teacher-centred/whole class instruction
individualised instruction
learner-active
multi-mode/multi-sensory instruction
use of drama, music, drawing
informal activities
class outings, activities.

Course outcomes

Question 9: What do you think are the major outcomes for learners in Certificate 1 Band A classes in terms of settlement and/or community access?
The most frequently given response cited increased familiarity with and independent use of available services and facilities. Teachers said that field trips into the community introduced these facilities within a framework of encouragement and support for the learner. Field trips followed by classroom-based activities provided learners with assistance in understanding the role of these facilities and in negotiating access to them.

Question 10: What do you think are the major outcomes in terms of development of formal learning skills and strategies?
Every teacher said that learners can make significant achievements in Module 1 of the Certificate I in Spoken and Written English — the ‘Statement of Orientation to Learning’, which addresses competencies related to the development of learning strategies and use of learning resources.

Question 11: What language outcomes essential to initial settlement would be achievable within the 510 hours entitlement for learners in this category?
Teachers in all states considered that some competencies of the Certificate I in Spoken and Written English are particularly relevant to the Community Access goals of the course. The competencies which were most frequently named as being achievable were those which supported the community access goals of interaction within the community to meet basic needs; that is:

• Competency 4 Can provide personally relevant information using spoken language.
• Competency 7 Can read social sight signs.
• Competency 11 Can complete a simple formatted text.
The full range of language outcomes named by teachers were:

- Competency 3 Can demonstrate understanding of a spoken information text.
- Competency 4 Can provide personally relevant information using spoken language.
- Competency 5 Can request information/goods using spoken language.
- Competency 7 Can read social sight signs.
- Competency 8 Can read a short information text.
- Competency 11 Can complete a simple formatted text.

**Question 12. Are there any other aspects of teaching and learning in Band A classes that you would like to comment on?**

There were further comments about teaching and learning for students with special needs, and the following represent the comments that were made most frequently.

- A statement or award should be offered for learners with special needs which recognises that some language outcomes related to settlement needs are achievable. The Orientation to Learning Statement does not address language outcomes.
- Bilingual assistance should be provided to give information to learners about course goals, aims, requirements, etc.
- Bilingual teaching or assistance should be provided for learners with special needs in order to decrease the pressure, and make English language learning easier and more accessible.
- The demands on teachers in special needs classes are much greater and should be recognised; that is, face-to-face teaching hours should be lowered in order the accommodate the greater demands for materials preparation.
- Classes for survivors of torture and trauma make extra demands on teachers and they should also have reduced face-to-face teaching hours. Teachers should be offered training; that is awareness of issues relevant to teaching survivors of torture and trauma, and teaching procedures and practices which are conducive to learning for this group.
- Special skills and strategies are required to teach these classes and staff development should be provided for teachers new to this area of teaching.
Chapter 3

Case study

The case study component of this research project was conducted in a class of Band A learners. Three students were identified for particular study.

The research involved observation and participation in the class on a weekly basis for a period of 8 weeks. The researcher undertook the role of participant/observer in order to observe and document the features of a Band A class, and to observe the ways that learners with different characteristics approached the activity of learning spoken and written English.

The course structure

The descriptor for the class is Band A (1), which means that it was an initial class for beginner learners with characteristics which are described in the Class Profile below.

The class was held three mornings a week, for a total of eight hours, and ran for ten weeks. As is the usual practice in this teaching centre the students’ learning gains were assessed towards the end of the course, and the managers, teacher and learners in the class work collaboratively to determine which course the learners will be subsequently enrolled in. This means that the composition of this class could change in the next course.

In order to provide continuity of course design for the learners, the teacher would remain with the class for 20 weeks; that is, for the initial course and one subsequent course. Individual learners who have made average progress in the class would continue with the subsequent class. In the course of the 20 weeks some learners may request transfers to faster, slower, higher or lower classes, or decide to defer their study. Equally, learners returning for a deferred course, or who have requested a transfer into this class may also join it at the beginning of the subsequent course.

Sixteen learners were assigned to this class, but according to the class roll one was a ‘no show’, that is, never attended a session; one withdrew in the first week; and two more withdrew in the fourth week, leaving a total of thirteen students attending.

The classroom environment

The classroom was smaller than the standard classrooms in the region but provided a good standard of accommodation for this class of 13 students. The room was well-lit, carpeted and air conditioned and was furnished with modern comfortable chairs, desks and tables. The desks were arranged in
a wide U-shape facing the whiteboard and the teacher. The teacher had easy access to the individuals in the class and had a clear view of each desk. In turn all her movements were clearly visible to the learners. The wall behind the learners had windows across its full width which looked out onto a corridor. The door to the classroom also provided access to this corridor.

Class profile

Band A (1) describes the class as a group of learners who:
- had recently arrived in Australia
- had less than seven years of education
- were accessing their first class out of the 510 hour entitlement
- were at beginner level.

However, Table 1, which draws on client data recorded on the ARMS database, shows that the characteristics of individual learners varied from the class descriptor, particularly in the areas date of arrival and years of education. The date of arrival recorded on the ARMS database was not the actual date on which clients arrived in Australia, it was the date on which the visa was issued. For example, learner 12 in Table 1 told his teacher that he arrived in Australia from the People’s Republic of China in 1987. In line with Australian Government policy he was granted a visa for permanent residence in November 1994. His date of arrival was then recorded as November 1994, even though he had actually been in Australia for 7 years. The normal three-month registration period for entry into the AMEP would then have applied as for other applicants. The twelve-month delay before he accessed a class could be explained by the option to defer if an application was made during the registration period.

Table 1 shows the range of experience with formal education as 0-12 years. There is no entry in the field ‘Years of education’ for three of the learners in this class. However, the application forms show a range of 0-15 years of education amongst the learners, as follows:
- 4 learners had less than 7 years of education (Band A),
- 8 learners had 7-12 years of education (Band B)
- 1 learner had more than 14 years of education (Band C).

Fewer than one-third of the learners in this class fit the descriptor for Band A students, that is, having less than 7 years of education. The largest group was the Band B learners who have 7-12 years of education. They comprised more than half of the class.

Table 1 shows almost all of the variables described by teachers who were surveyed as being characteristics occurring frequently among learners in Band A classes, that is:
- low literacy levels in L1
- non-roman script in first language
- older age learners
- effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.
In the teaching centre where the class was held the assessment and referral (AR) teacher agreed that if one or more of the above variables appeared to affect the learner’s performance on the assessment tasks during the interview, they were taken as possible indicators of a slower rate of progress in learning. On that basis a client could have been assigned to a Band A class even if they had more than seven years education.

She also added that learners whose L1 is a tonal language often experience difficulty with the auditory discrimination of the phonology of English, and that also were taken into consideration when assessing students’ learning pace and assigning them to a class.

**Table 1: Client data for case study class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learner</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Date of birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of education</th>
<th>Date of arrival</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>10/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yugoslav</td>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chilean</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>12/93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Iraqi</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>6/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yugoslav</td>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>P.R.China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>P.R. China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11/94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>P.R. China</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5/95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The teacher**

Cathy, the class teacher, had seven years teaching experience in AMES with a considerable amount of that experience gained in teaching on Band A classes. She considered this class to be quite disparate in terms of length of time in Australia and experiences of formal education, and consequently in literacy levels in L1. She expressed concerns about the difficulty of meeting the disparate needs of this group who all showed the characteristic of being at a very teacher-dependent stage of their learning.

**Course design**

Cathy’s course design was informed by theories of learning that included the development of spoken and written language skills that were personally relevant and purposeful in a variety of social contexts, and a language experience approach for teaching reading and writing. She commented that the low intensity of the course and the nature of the class profile indicated to her a need for very limited content, frequent recycling and the development of effective, independent language learning strategies.
Course goals

For this initial course she decided to focus on helping the learners to develop:

• classroom-based language learning skills and strategies
• the spoken and written language skills required to respond to requests for personal information in a variety of contexts.

Her rationale for these goals was based on her knowledge of the previous educational experiences of this group of learners, and the language needed to interact in the community to meet their settlement needs.

Teaching methodology

Cathy drew upon a repertoire of teaching strategies that focused initially on a highly teacher-centred approach with strong focus on support for individual learners. Gradually the repertoire of teaching and learner activities expanded to include whole class communication activities, discussion, pair work and group work. Teacher-modelling was a prominent feature of all the spoken language activities, giving learners maximum opportunity to successfully construct the language concepts. Learners were monitored in all of their spoken exchanges and Cathy intervened with assistance when learners hesitated or seemed unsure or otherwise indicated they needed help.

In each teaching session the teacher and learners participated in three or four learning activities. New language and concepts were kept to a minimum as the learners became more familiar with the learning activities. The learners were exposed to a range of learning activities throughout the course, each new activity being introduced through known concepts or language. As they became familiar with the activity, it was used as a vehicle to introduce new language and concepts.

Cathy’s teaching exemplified an approach which met the learners at the point of their learning development. She started with the language and learning skills the learners had brought to class and slowly expanded their skills from that base. For example, she was aware that a proportion of the class had had some formal schooling and were literate in their first language, while others had minimal or no schooling. She noticed that the literate group used written language as a support for their learning by copying into their books everything that was written on the board. Some also wrote word meanings in their first language. Cathy consciously supported this learning strategy by writing new or relevant vocabulary items on the board, and explicitly focusing on its inherent graphophonic structure. This strategy satisfied the need of the literate learners to take notes as a support for independent revision and study at home, while introducing non-literate learners to the surface features of individual words.
Sample lesson

The language content that Cathy introduced in the initial sessions was based on the learners’ personal biodata — names, addresses and important dates. In one such lesson, based on the language concept of ‘address’, Cathy focused the group’s attention on the whiteboard and on herself as she explained the meaning of the word and wrote examples on the board from the learners’ data. She gained the full attention of the group by drawing individuals in, asking them questions about their address and writing their response on the board.

The learners were totally focused on Cathy. As she asked each learner for their address, the whole group listened to the exchange, and maintained their own participation in various ways. Some quietly repeated the question to themselves, some silently read their addresses on their ID cards, others watched and listened. Cathy repeated this process with all of the students, all the time checking that everyone was involved in the exchange, displaying comprehension, and keeping pace with her.

She varied and extended the activity by drawing attention to the pronunciation and spelling of the word ‘address’, the place value of numbers and the spelling of students’ street names and suburbs. She focused strongly on correct verbal responses and guided incorrect responses through modelling or by directing the learners to written models such as the ID cards which she had prepared for them.

This activity took approximately 20 minutes and demanded a high level of concentration and participation by the learners. In this time all the learners were given opportunities to respond to the question, to clarify uncertainties relating to the meaning and to practise the correct pronunciation of the words in their address. The activity also served to recycle concepts and language recently learned such as ordinal number, upper and lower case, alphabet, and the left to right orientation of written English.

The next activity involved a change in the focus of the students’ attention and pace. Each student was given a simple proforma onto which they were to copy their address from their identity card. There was some initial hesitation as learners confirmed with the teacher or with the researcher what they needed to do. They then engaged with the task, using a range of strategies to accomplish it. Some copied the written model, some copied from other students, some discussed the task together in their first language. The pace was relaxed and unhurried. The students with better literacy skills finished first, but seemed content to wait while the teacher assisted others.

A separate activity recycled the same concepts and language but drew on word and number recognition skills, and allowed the learners to set the pace and maintain control over their activity. In this activity Cathy placed all the addresses of the learners on cut-up cards on a table in the centre of the room and asked the students to find their own address. This required the students to remember the details of their street name and number, suburb and postcode, and to identify them from among other similar...
address details. They looked at their own cards, tried to memorise the
details, and then looked among Cathy’s cards to find the appropriate card.
Although Cathy demonstrated and modelled this activity for the learners,
she allowed them to use their own strategies for completing it. Some
learners were not able to memorise their own address and took their own
card to the table to match it with Cathy’s card. Cathy was aware of this and
was quite comfortable with having each of the learners make their own
decisions about how to achieve the aims of the exercise to the best of their
personal ability.

Despite the teacher-centred whole-class approach, it was clear that the
students were not passive learners. There was continuous interaction
between teacher and learners, and elicitation and reinforcement of correct
response were strong features of the spoken interactions.

No-one was pressured to complete an activity or respond quickly to the
teacher, it was simply taken for granted that the learners could judge for
themselves when and how to work and when to rest. When the teacher was
helping an individual student others were writing, reading or talking in L1
about the task at hand, or the meaning of language items. Some simply
listened to the interaction between the teacher and the other learner. None
of this was directed by the teacher, the learners managed their own
learning.

Cathy acknowledged that occasionally an activity did not proceed in the
direction she intended because the learners had not understood the
procedure clearly. When this occurred she allowed the learners to take
control of the activity themselves and to complete it to their own
satisfaction rather than hers. She was not flustered by the change of
direction or the different results, but analysed the reasons for the change.
She was vigilant in correcting the learners spoken and written production
of language but used modelling and approval of correct production rather
than criticism or insincere praise. The learners appeared to see this
correction as part of the learning process and often sought it from her and
from the researcher. She spent time with the learners who needed more
assistance with activities, assisting them, modelling for them and giving
them as much help as they required. She never in any way indicated that
she believed them to be slow to learn.

The high degree of participation in the class activities appeared to reflect
positive attitudes generally: the high rate of punctuality and attendance
were further indications of the same attitude.

Learning strategies

Three learners, identified as learners 6, 8 and 13 on Table 1 and who have
been called Rima, Leila and Lee-Ling in the following text, were identified
for particular study. They were selected on the basis that they represented
the range of characteristics that teachers described as typically occurring
in Band A classes. These three students gave permission for the
description of their learning activities to be included.
Solely in terms of education level, Rima, Leila and Lee-Ling represent Bands A, B and C respectively. Each displayed at least two of the other learner characteristics described by teachers in the survey; that is, low literacy levels in L1, L1 script different to roman, older age group or survivors of torture or trauma. The learners who were selected as best representing the range of characteristics happened to be female, which was a likely outcome given the greater proportion of females to males in the class.

Profiles of the students

Rima
Rima is 42 years old and comes from Iraq. Her first language is Kurdish. She also speaks Turkish and Arabic fluently. She told the teacher that she came to Australia as a refugee via Turkey after fleeing from Iraq. She came to Australia with her husband and some of her children. Her adult children are still in Turkey. She hasn’t had any formal schooling and is not literate in any of the languages she speaks. Rima’s husband is also a student in this class.

This course is her second in AMES, having deferred from her initial course. She had been in Australia for approximately 8 months at the start of this course. She was identified for particular study late in this phase of the project after Cathy expressed concerns about her rate of learning, and in particular with her literacy.

Leila
Leila is 55 years old, and comes from Egypt. She has been in Australia about six months. She has had nine years of education and speaks, reads and writes Arabic. The assessment and referral teacher noted in her initial assessment that Leila had difficulties writing in roman script, and on that basis assigned her to a slow initial class with a recommendation that she be re-assessed at the end of her initial class.

Lee-Ling
Lee-Ling is 62 years old and is from the People’s Republic of China. She has had 15 years of education, but at her assessment interview she requested a slow-paced class. At the beginning of this course she had been in Australia for approximately nine months.

A comparison of learning strategies

The kinds of strategies these three learners used to manage their learning in the class were documented using Willing’s (1987: 279–288) ‘strategies for information control’. Lee-Ling has had 15 years of education and she drew strongly on her literacy skills in both Chinese and English to manage her learning. She also made full use of the other Chinese students as a resource for learning. Lee-Ling could work independently and also cooperatively with her Chinese classmates. They worked together as a team, discussing, assisting and checking with each other on each task.
Lee-Ling’s workbook had lists of vocabulary in clear categories and showed Chinese translations of each item. Her book was highly organised and she referred back to it when addressing tasks which called on previously learned language. When the teacher addressed Lee-Ling, she frequently looked to her Chinese colleague to confirm her understanding or to request an explanation. She was a keen and active learner. She was less sure of herself in activities that involved manipulation of materials, such as matching or categorising. The reason for this seemed to be that she was not confident that she had understood the instructions clearly. She referred to her colleagues as they ‘coached’ her in the correct procedure, rather than focusing on the teacher’s instruction. She responded very quickly to complete the task when she was sure she has understood what was to be done.

Lee-Ling appeared to be very much at ease in the classroom. She made full use of the teachers and her colleagues as resources for learning. When the teacher was assisting other learners, she revised her work, practised pronunciation, looked in the dictionary and wrote translations, or discussed her work with her colleagues. The pace of the class seemed to suit her and to allow her to manage her own learning.

Leila was literate in Arabic, but had difficulties with writing in English script. She watched the teacher very closely throughout the lesson and used the teacher as a major resource for learning. Like Lee-Ling, Leila sometimes did not understand the teacher’s spoken instructions. Whilst Lee-Ling turned to her colleagues for an explanation, Leila waited for the teacher to paraphrase the instructions and to demonstrate the activity, then watched what other learners did before attempting the activity herself.

Writing was a slow and difficult process for Leila and consequently she was less likely to use her own written notes as a learning resource. Her word-recognition skills were better developed than her writing, and she used teacher-made resources as models in writing activities. For example, in a form-filling exercise, she located her teacher-made identity card and copied the details, rather than look in her own copybook as Lee-Ling did.

While Lee-Ling’s learning was processed through reading and writing, Leila focused more on the spoken word. In whole-class activities focused on the teacher’s models, Leila watched her closely as she modelled words, phrases and clauses.

When the teacher interacted with other learners during the production and practice phase, Leila watched her closely, repeating the teacher’s language quietly to herself and listening to and repeating the responses of the other learners. Leila rarely discussed her learning with other students, but in a writing activity would often look at others’ work, apparently to confirm that her approach to the task was appropriate or correct. Sometimes she would turn to the researcher to check her written work or to practise spoken language. Like Lee-ling, Leila also seemed comfortable with the pace of the class and was relaxed in class. When she finished tasks, she watched and listened to the teacher. She rarely looked through her book or initiated conversation with other classmates in either Arabic or English. She seemed content to wait for the teacher to indicate the next activity, and did not attempt to extend her learning beyond the teacher's activities.
Rima was a very communicative, outgoing woman. She liked to joke with the teacher and a classmate who had become a friend. Like Leila, she attended very closely to spoken language activities. She was very alert to the phonological features of language and she repeated newly-learned items frequently and often appeared to discuss the meaning of words with her friend. Her script formation was better than Leila’s, but she perceived herself as non-literate and seemed to believe she could not learn to read. She looked worried and insecure during reading and writing activities and often resorted to copying irrelevant words and texts as a means of keeping busy when others were engaged in constructing texts. Cathy said that her concentration span was erratic, and she attributed this to the difficulties associated with Rima’s flight from Iraq, subsequent settlement and resettlement in Turkey and Australia. Her low concentration levels and erratic memory exacerbated her difficulties with learning to read.

Rima’s demeanour in whole-class activities that involve speaking and listening show a dramatic change in enthusiasm, interest and participation and she often tried to extend her contributions beyond the language the teacher wanted to elicit. For example, in one lesson the teacher showed the group photographs from their recent excursion. She was trying to elicit from the group the names and activities shown in the photo. Rima ‘guessed’ vocabulary items frequently, and closely watched the teacher’s face for ‘clues’ to the answers. Her responses were contextually accurate and she frequently tried to extend the story by offering observations about activities the teacher had not yet asked for. If the teacher indicated her answers were incorrect she quickly changed her answer to the teacher’s. She seemed very concerned to be giving ‘correct’ answers, although in this activity there was room for interpretation of the events in several ways. The concern for ‘correctness’ indicated a lack of confidence in her own judgment.

Lee-Ling and Rima were polar opposites in terms of using learning strategies and resources. Lee-Ling’s high literacy level and familiarity with formal learning strategies allowed her to consolidate her class work by undertaking independent learning, thus providing her with more recycling and repetition, ultimately increasing her learning pace. However she was not confident of her listening skills and always conferred with classmates about the teacher’s instructions.

Rima did not ‘anchor’ her learning with the written word but was very aurally oriented and developed a base knowledge of the language through interacting with the teacher and other learners in the class. She followed spoken teaching instructions without difficulty, and entered into a negotiation with the teacher if she was unsure. However, in writing activities she copied her classmates rather than asked the teacher questions. She could recognise some personally relevant written words, and could use her visual skills to match and classify vocabulary items. However, these kinds of activities made great demands on her concentration and tired her quickly.

In the later stages of the course the three learners were asked questions about their names, nationalities, date of arrival, and where they lived.
(elements of Competency 4: Can provide personally relevant information using spoken language). They were all able to provide the correct information, very slowly. Rima provided all information except for her address, but was also able to communicate to me that she had recently moved to a new address. The whole class was given a simple form to complete. Leila could not remember her address, and did not have her identity card with her, so she borrowed her husband’s and completed the form independently. The result shows the difficulties Leila had with using Roman script. Lee-Ling had an extensive discussion with her classmates in Chinese, apparently about each of the categories on the form, before completing her form.

By the end of the course these learners had experienced a range of learning strategies for language and literacy development and had demonstrated gains made in some elements of competencies 1, 2, 7 and 11 (see Table 3 in Chapter 5). They were all able to answer simple questions about their names, addresses, nationalities and some relevant dates. In a writing task, Lee-Ling and Leila were able to fill out a form using their identity cards as a guide. They were also able to identify a category on the form which was unfamiliar to them, and then locate that information from the class roll. Rima had also further developed her oral and literacy skills and could read and write some elements of personal information. She was absent for the writing task given to Lee-Ling and Leila and so did not have a full assessment.

Cathy expressed some concern about the difficulties of teaching such a disparate group, and particularly with supporting and extending literacy development for the learners with a wide range of literacy backgrounds. She said that the learners who had made the least literacy gains, including Rima, would have been better served by a class which had a strong focus on developing basic literacy skills rather than being in the same class as learners with high levels of education and commensurate literacy.
Chapter 4

Learner interviews

Data collection and recording

An interview was conducted with learners at the New South Wales Health Department funded Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS). It was an unstructured discussion about their experiences of learning English. The English teacher for the group, translated and sometimes paraphrased their responses. These responses were recorded by handwritten notes, as tape or video recording would have been inappropriate. Because of the discussion format, and because of the method of recording notes by hand, it was not possible to always report responses verbatim and most of the discussion has been paraphrased. A selection of verbatim responses are included at the end of this chapter. A copy of this report was forwarded to the group for verification.

Membership of discussion group

The six members of the discussion group were all women, and were currently in an English class taught by an employee of STARTTS. The ages ranged from young to middle-aged. Experiences of formal education among the group varied from less than 5 years to 14 years. Two members of the group said they had taught themselves to read and write Spanish when they were young. Most had had some experience of learning English at AMES, but had not completed the 510 hour entitlement, for the reasons cited below.

Summary of interview

Members of this group used the word ‘stress’ frequently when describing their previous experiences in learning English in AMES or TAFE classes and cited stress as the reason for discontinuing. They named the following sources of pressure in the learning environment:

- difficulties in understanding the teacher without L1 assistance
- fast-paced classes
- increasing levels of difficulty as language skills developed
- trying to ‘keep up’ with other classmates
- the pressure of ‘performing’ in front of classmates
• teacher expectations of independent study (homework)
• not enough time allowed for consolidation of language before new items introduced (i.e., learning pace).

The group also felt that their teachers did not understand that they had difficulty in concentrating on learning in the classroom as a result of the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Syndrome, concern about the welfare of family members who were left behind in their country of origin, and the pressures of coping with settlement in Australia.

The effect of these experiences exacerbated their already high stress levels, sometimes causing physical illness and making it impossible for them to continue to attend. They became discouraged about learning English because the classes were not meeting their learning needs. In turn this situation also had the effect of increasing stress because they are acutely aware of their need to develop communication skills in English.

When asked what recommendations they would make for a course, they unanimously recommended bilingual classes. They asked for teachers to start at a very basic level, and to ensure all students have mastered a step before moving on. They expected teachers to accommodate differing learning styles and not to assume that students have acquired an understanding of formal learning skills.

They described their current course at STARTTS as a relaxed and unpressured one, with a clear sequential progression accommodating to their different learning styles.

**Verbatim comments from the discussion**

*Three days per week is suitable intensity for a course.*

*A slow pace is helpful.*

*The teacher spoke Italian, so this helped me.*

*Worksheets given to me were too difficult and I couldn’t do them.*

*I was upset by work that was too difficult because I also have other problems to deal with. It made me depressed so I didn’t return to the next course.*

*Writing was the most difficult because I have a low level of education in Spanish.*

*Because I have a low level of education in Spanish, it is difficult for me to learn English.*

*I can read more easily than write. I gave my husband the worksheets to do for me.*

*At the beginning I thought it would be easy, but as it (the level) got higher the work became harder.*
I finished the class but learned little because of the pressure of the course.

I expected peace here but found too much pressure in the class.

They gave me homework but I just didn't understand.

I felt very depressed because my classmates did their homework but I couldn't do it because I had problems in my head. I got very depressed.

Evening class was very stressful. I had a bad experience [on the way to class] with a person who tried to take my purse.

The pressure of the class caused headaches, then dizziness, and vomiting.

I told CES of my symptoms and said if they don’t accept me as a non-English speaker they should send me back to El Salvador.

The stress of learning English created more stress and pressure for me.

They didn’t tell me when I had the interview to come to Australia that I would have to learn English.

When I went to English class, instead of learning English I got sick.

I couldn’t concentrate in class because my husband was sick, so I was thinking about him instead of learning.

I had to wait 3 months for class.

At the interview (for English class) I gave all my answers in Spanish.

I felt the pressure of performing in front of my classmates.

When my children were older they helped me. I started by writing a sentence every day.

I had to register for classes within 3 months, but I would have preferred not to start immediately, to have some time to establish myself here first.

Because I did well at the interview they sent me to TAFE but everyone in that class spoke perfect English, so I felt sick and didn’t go back again.

The first classes were very low level, very basic. I learned and felt very good; I enjoyed the class and my classmates.

Illness, weakness and sleepiness made classes difficult and I had to leave, but now I regret it.

Bilingual classes would be easier for us.

The pace of the class should be slow, the teacher should make sure we know the work before we learn new things.
Sometimes the teacher gives more attention to the higher level students.

I didn’t learn to read and write Spanish when I was a child but I taught myself when I was a teenager.

I learned to write Spanish when I was a little girl because I wanted to have a boyfriend and I wanted to write to him.

I learned to read Spanish because I wanted to read stories.

We really want to learn English because we understand that we are in an English-speaking country, but the classes at TAFE and AMES don’t help because they are high level, too fast and too pressured.

The class we have now (bilingual class at STARTTS) is easier because the teacher speaks Spanish, there is no pressure and it is relaxed and comfortable. We have a good relationship with the teacher.
Chapter 5

Analysis of learner characteristics and language outcomes

A comprehensive analysis of statistics relating to the characteristics and learning outcomes of learners in Stage 1 Band A could not be undertaken because at the time of this project a database restructure was under way to integrate statistics stored on the two separate systems (AMIS and Clarion) into a national database — ARMS. Anomalies and discrepancies in the data became evident during this process and had not been resolved at the time of the completion of the project reported in this book.

However, as this project was limited to a study of learners in Certificate I Band A, it was possible to view some characteristics among these learners and to identify their learning achievements. The characteristics which can be identified through the biodata on learners include age, years of education and visa sub-class.

In the period July-December 1995, 175 learners who entered the AMEP as CSWE I Band A exited with an award from the Certificate I in Spoken and Written English. Of this group 138 achieved a CSWE I award. In the same period 209 CSWE I Band A learners exited without an award. This review will analyse the characteristics and learning outcomes of the 209 learners who exited without an award.

Visa class

The visa sub-class is a means of identifying learners who arrived in Australia via the humanitarian program. It includes Refugee and Special Assistance categories.

Of the 209 learners in this sample, 43 per cent arrived in Australia through the humanitarian program. Of this group the largest category were learners who arrived on the Yugoslavs Special Assistance program. They comprised 30 per cent of the learners who arrived through the humanitarian program. Of 209 learners in the sample group 48 per cent arrived through the Family Reunion program, and 9 per cent in the Independent Skills category.
Years of education

Of the 209 learners in this group who entered the AMEP at CSWE I Band A, 17 did not have an entry for years of education. Of the remaining 192, approximately 26 per cent had less than 7 years of education, 61 per cent had between 7 and 12 years of education (Band B) and 13 per cent had more than 12 years of education (Band C). The large number of students in this group with more than 7 years of education indicates that their placement in Band A was based on characteristics other than low education levels.

Age

The age range in this population of students is shown in Table 2. This table shows that the greatest concentration of learners is in the 26-55 year old range, with the largest group aged 36-45. Approximately 15 per cent of the group are over 56 years of age.

Table 2: Ages of students entering AMEP as CSWE I Band A, July–December 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Number of clients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 65</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>209</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning outcomes

Table 3 shows that, although this group did not achieve an award, their learning outcomes can be described in terms of achievement or partial achievement of some of the competencies of the CSWE I award. This table shows that partial achievement of all competencies occurs within a limited range of variation. Full achievement of individual competencies shows the greatest number of learners achieving competency 4, followed closely by Competencies 11, 2, 1, 5 and 3. Competencies 4 and 11 assess the ability to provide personal information in spoken and written form and Competency 5 relates to the negotiation of goods and services using spoken language. Competencies 1 and 2 assess the ability to use a range of learning strategies and resources and Competency 3 assesses competency in understanding spoken instructions.
Table 3: Learning outcomes by competency (Certificate in Spoken and Written English I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Achieved</th>
<th>Partly achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Can undertake the roles and responsibilities of a learner in a formal learning environment</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Can use a range of learning strategies and resources</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Can demonstrate understanding of spoken information text</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Can provide personally relevant information using spoken language</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Can request information/goods using spoken language</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Can tell a short recount</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Can read social signs</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Can read simple written instructions</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Can read a short information text</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Can read a short narrative/recount</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Can complete a simple formatted text</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Can write a short description</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Can write a short recount</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Although the statistics shown in this chapter cannot be regarded as totally reliable, they do give some indication of the characteristics of these learners who exited CSWE I A without a CSWE I award in December 1995. This data shows that the majority of these learners could not be described as aged, or as having particularly low levels of education. The numbers of learners who arrived in Australia through the humanitarian program appear to indicate the presence of characteristics which have an impact on achievement in language learning. The figures indicate the kinds of achievements that these learners made and shows a trend towards gains in knowledge and learning competencies, and those competencies that are integral to community access and settlement needs.
Chapter 6

Summary of findings

The findings of the project are the result of an examination of the qualitative data provided by the teacher survey, the case study, and the learner interview data, and the quantitative data provided by the AMEP data base, ARMS.

The qualitative data provided information on the learner profiles and characteristics of learners in Certificate I Band A classes who need a specific type of provision to achieve their language and learning goals. It also described the kinds of learning arrangements that can facilitate the achievement of these goals.

The quantitative data provided some indication of the characteristics of a group of learners who entered the AMEP in Certificate I Band A and exited in 1995 without achieving an award. It showed the language and learning outcomes they achieved within their period of entitlement expressed in terms of achievement or partial achievement of competencies from the Certificate I in Spoken and Written English.

Characteristics of learners with special needs

Teachers were able to identify learner categories, or learner profiles for students who may be expected to have special learning needs, and identified sets of typically-occurring learning characteristics for each group. These learner profiles and their characteristics are outlined in Appendix 3. The teachers working group saw these characteristics as indicators for a need for learning arrangements which included the elements specified in Appendix 4.

The most frequently named characteristics which identify learners as having special needs fall into two categories:

- those that are social and cultural and experiential determinants of learning pace, language-learning style, etc.
- psychosocial variables related to self-perception as a learner, and/or effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In the affective domain these learners are characterised by descriptors such as low confidence, lack of self-esteem and learner anxiety. In the cognitive domain difficulties with memory and low concentration levels were frequently cited in several learner profile groups by the teachers in the survey.

The groups named most frequently as having special learning needs were:
Aged learners
Learners with low levels of literacy in L1
Learners with no formal education background
Students from non-roman script backgrounds
Survivors of torture and trauma.

All of these learner profiles were represented in the case study. The learner sample examined through the data base showed proportionately fewer learners over the age of 56, and a larger concentration of learners with more than 7 years of education. There are no reliable indicators for the presence of PTSD syndrome or trauma among learners, but visa classes which show that learners have arrived through the humanitarian category of the migration program are at the very least indicators of involuntary relocation to Australia. The literature review and the learner interviews refer to the continuing post-settlement trauma for refugees, the difficulties it creates for language learning and the ways that inappropriate provision exacerbates the trauma reactions.

Teachers found that although the groups identified shared some similar characteristics, their particular language learning needs varied according to the extent of the learners’ previous educational experiences. On that basis combinations of some learner groups may form a viable class of learners with similar learning needs; however, classes formed on the basis of a range of characteristics which indicate a slow pace of learning will often result in such a disparate group that their very different language and literacy needs will not be effectively met.

A crucial factor appears to be the learners’ education levels, which indicate the extent of previous experience with formal learning, and literacy in L1. In the data base sample Band A learners with 7-12 years of education outnumbered those with less than 7 years by a ratio of approximately 2:1. This would indicate disparate class groups in terms of experience with formal learning, language learning strategies, literacy in L1 and the rate of literacy development in English. The case study was an example of such a class group.

Refugees who are survivors of torture and trauma are considered by teachers to be special cases whose learning characteristics are often negatively affected by the effects of PTSD. The recommendations for this group are reported separately from those for learners with learning characteristics which are more clearly related to previous educational experiences.

**Recommended course provision for Certificate 1 Band A learners**

Teachers in all states shared a high level of concern for the special learning needs of the different learner profiles in Band A classes and frequently stated that the needs of these learners called for a specific kind of course provision characterised by:
• assessment and referral schemes which can identify special needs at entry into the program
• bilingual assistance for course information, goal clarification, language learning
• lower intensity courses
• a teaching methodology which has as explicit goals the development of language learning strategies and spoken and written language for community access
• teachers trained to identify special needs and develop appropriate strategies to meet them
• recognition within the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) for achievement of language goals related to settlement needs, and the need for further education and training.

Recommended course provision for survivors of torture and trauma

Teachers currently report significant numbers in classes of learners displaying symptoms of trauma. The pre-settlement and post-settlement trauma suffered by refugees and survivors of torture indicates a need for a uniquely designed set of learning circumstances which recognises that the instructional provision for these learners must be highly sensitised to accommodate their physical and psychological needs as well as language learning needs.

Teachers called for:

• Classroom resources that take into account learners’ physical and psychological suffering (ie adequate heating, lighting, comfortable furniture arrangements, attractive surroundings)
• Bilingual information sessions for learners on course provision, the competency-based curriculum, assessment, and the effects of symptoms of PTSD on language learning
• Consultation and collaborative provision with specialised agencies (eg STARTTS and Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and Trauma [VFSTT]) which includes:
  – training and awareness-raising for teachers
  – provision of counselling for learners
  – collaborative planning for effective provision and resources
  – collaborative development of effective course design practices
  – ongoing participation and evaluation of courses
• Training for teachers which addresses classroom strategies for learners with symptoms of PTSD.
Teachers in South Australia recommended that learners in this group should be assigned to classes on the basis of their learning characteristics, that is, language level and years of education, and should be given appropriate support in the classroom rather than grouped together on the basis of being survivors of torture and trauma.

Awareness-raising professional development activities are provided for all teachers in NSW AMES via a program entitled 'Eye of the Needle', developed by STARTTS. In Victoria each learning centre has a member of staff trained in the identification of survivors of torture, and in the development of effective teaching strategies which address the effects of PTSD symptoms on learning (Aristotle 1996).

**Language outcomes for learners with special needs**

In the survey 92 per cent of teachers saw Competencies 1 and 2, which address learning strategies and the use of learning resources (the module ‘Statement of Competency Orientation to Learning’) as achievable within 510 hours.

Ninety-four percent of teachers also said that in 510 hours they believed learners could achieve the following language competencies:

- Competency 4: Can provide personally relevant information using spoken language.
- Competency 7: Can read social sight signs.
- Competency 11 Can complete a simple formatted text.

In the range of competencies which teachers believed to be achievable, the speaking, listening and reading competencies outnumbered the writing competencies. Teachers acknowledged that they prioritised Competencies 4, 7 and 11 within the course goals of language for community access. For learners with the profiles typically found in Band A, achievement of the other written competencies within the entitlement period was seen to be problematic.

The statistics on a sample of Band A learners who did not achieve the Certificate I Award confirmed the teachers’ perceptions. Competencies 1, 2, 4, 7 and 11 were the most frequently achieved, while 12 and 13 (see Table 3, Chapter 5) — the written competencies — were achieved by fewer learners. Partial achievement was relatively evenly spread across all competencies.

The teachers who were surveyed made a number of recommendations which are outlined in the Summary and Findings of the Teacher Survey. They include:

- low intensity learning arrangements (ie 2-3 hours per day)
- lower student/teacher ratio (ie a maximum of 15 students)
- bilingual provision
• staff development sessions on issues around teaching Band A
• staff training on issues around teaching survivors of torture and trauma.

The learners from STARTTS also made recommendations for:
• bilingual provision
• teachers who are aware of issues surrounding learning for refugees and survivors of torture and trauma
• teachers who are aware of issues surrounding learning for students who have limited experience of formal schooling.
References


Aggarwal, L. 1985. *A course of English for older students.* Western Australia: AMES.


Cunningham, M., R. Becker and J. Aroche. (undated) *STARTTS Eye of the needle trainers’ kit.* Sydney: STARTTS.


Parks, E. (Undated) ‘Addressing the special needs of the torture victim in the ESL class’. Toronto: Canadian Centre For Victims of Torture.


Appendix 1

Teacher survey

Class placement

1. What factors contribute to the placement of learners in Band A classes?
   (a) at assessment and referral
   (b) at re-enrolment or re-assignment

2. What learning arrangements (eg course intensity, class size, etc) do you think are most appropriate to the learning needs of Band A students?

Learner profiles

3. In your current/most recent Band A class, approximately what percentage of learners would belong to the following categories:
   (a) less than 7 years education/disrupted education
   (b) non-roman script background
   (c) literacy not commensurate with oracy
   (d) refugee/torture/trauma background
   (e) aged

4. What are the learning characteristics of the students in each of these categories?

5. Would you say that these groups had similar learning characteristics/needs?

Course planning and delivery

6. (a) How relevant/important are the following as course goals for a Band A class?
   Community access/involvement/settlement
   Development learning skills/strategies
   Language outcomes

(b) Are there any others that are equally important?
7. Do you think community access goals contribute to the settlement process of students? In what ways?

8. How do you take Band A learner characteristics into consideration in course planning and delivery in the following areas:
   - Planning content
   - Materials preparation (i.e. worksheets, realia, OHTs, audio/video)
   - Teaching strategies

Course Outcomes

9. What do you think are the major outcomes for learners in Certificate Band A classes in terms of settlement and/or community access?

10. What are the major outcomes in terms of development of formal learning skills and strategies?

11. What language outcomes essential to initial settlement would be achievable within the 510 hours entitlement, for learners in this category?

12. Are there any other aspects of teaching and learning in Band A classes that you wish to comment on?
## Appendix 2

### Summary of responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Basis of assignment to Band A at A&amp;R interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Learner profile</td>
<td>age</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low education b/grnd</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TT survivor</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low literacy L1 or 2</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-roman script</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Performance on assessment task</td>
<td>slow, hesitant, lack of reading strategies, unable to attempt tasks</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Other indicators</td>
<td>student requests slow class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>non-verbal language indicates unfamiliarity with context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visual/hearing impairment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>availability of child care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only class with vacancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>only timeslot with vacancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basis for reassignment to Band A class</td>
<td>slower learning pace than current class</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has not developed appropriate learning strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Course provision</td>
<td>max. 15 students per class</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course intensity</td>
<td>max. 15 hrs per week</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>min. 20 hrs per week</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Learner profiles in highest nos. in NSW Band A

- Refugee/TT survivor: 50%
- Non-roman script background aged: 75%

### 4. Learner characteristics

See Table 3. Learner Profiles and Characteristics

### 5. Similarity of characteristics in different learners groups in Band A

Significant differences which indicate special provision for some learner groups

- Similar needs:
  - Limited language content
  - Slow pace
  - Development of learning skills/strategies

### 6. Important course goals

- Community Access: 74%
- Development learning strategies: 74%
- Language outcomes: 26%
- Develop confidence as learners: 80%

### 7. Importance of community access goals for settlement

- Very important: 99%
- Unimportant: 1%

### 8. Features of content

- Community access focus, concrete, relevant, contextualised, limited: 65%
- Teacher-prepared, variety of visual, pictorial: 72%
- Must be clear, unambiguous: 100%
- Explicit teaching of all tasks
- Variety of modes
- Multi-sense modes
- Teacher-centred
- Frequent recycling, revision
- Games, physical activities
9. Most frequently named settlement/community access outcomes
   Familiarity with community services and facilities 67
   Independent use of community services and facilities 60
   Expanded social networks 8

10. Most frequently named learning skills and strategies outcomes
    Competencies 1 and 2 (Orientation to Learning) 92

11. Most frequently named language outcomes
    Range of language outcomes named 94
    Competencies, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11

12. Other comments
    There is a need for:
    - bilingual information about course goals/requirements
    - bilingual teaching
    - an award for learners with special needs that reflects their language and non-language outcomes
    - recognition of greater demands for materials development for Special Needs classes, by reducing face-to-face teaching hours
    - recognition of special teaching skills required for special needs classes by providing professional development activities for newly assigned staff
    - recognition that survivors of torture and trauma are particularly ‘at-risk’ learners
    - support structures are required for learners and professional development and support should be provided for teachers
Appendix 3

Learner profiles and characteristics

Within each learner profile, characteristics have been listed from the most frequently observed by most teachers, to the least observed. The order implies no other significance.

Less than 7 years of education

highly developed aural skills
insecure in classroom learning environment
inexperienced with conventions of classroom practice (eg routines, relationships)
low confidence
low expectations
afraid of failure
unsure of teacher expectations
teacher-dependent
not familiar with teacher/learner roles/responsibilities
have difficulty with using resources for independent learning
inexperienced in organising learning materials
inexperienced with strategies for learning
short concentration span
have difficulty understanding abstract ideas
slow to learn script formation, decoding

Non-roman script background

slower to learn
slower to complete literacy tasks
affects the teacher more than the learner
no effect on learning
slower to learn script
have more to learn about writing (eg letter formation, line spacing)
develop different coping strategies
have difficulty understanding sound/letter relationship
motivated, younger, adaptable
Refugee / survivor of torture/trauma

short attention span
anxiety
lack concentration
poor memory
lack confidence
high expectations of teacher and themselves
frustration interferes with learning
wander in and out of classroom
low energy
hyperactive
preoccupied with family/settlement problems
health problems, frequently absent
suspicious
on edge
lack motivation
dull, sleepy, depressed
affected by medication
unsettled
have difficulty adjusting to life in Australia
lack close family unit and support
isolated
learning disability
sometimes low educational background, sometimes high educational background
physical, emotional and psychological suffering impedes learning
sensitive, easily upset, aggressive, hostile, ‘short fuse’
can’t relate to classmates or cooperate
erratic learning
ego-centred
behaviour inappropriate for class context

Older learner

slower at writing
use traditional learning strategies which they are familiar with
tolerant
willing to persevere
more realistic picture of life and learning
more flexible
often have visual impairment
often have hearing impairment
have authority in class
prefer reading/writing activities
sometimes low educational background
enjoy social aspects of being in class
get tired easily
poor short term memory
often have physical illness
low self-esteem as learners
don't like pressure
need relaxed atmosphere
rely heavily on L1
poor concentration
Appendix 4

Learner characteristics and indications for teaching

Less than 7 years of education

**Range of Learner characteristics**

- insecure in classroom learning environment
- inexperienced with conventions of classroom practice (eg routines, relationships)
- unsure of teacher expectations
- not familiar with teacher/learner roles/responsibilities
- teacher-dependent
- no control of formal strategies for learning
- have difficulty with using resources for independent learning
- limited to concrete concepts, can't abstract
- inexperienced in organising learning materials
- highly developed aural skills
- slow to learn script formation, word recognition, decoding
- Short concentration span
- have difficulty understanding abstract ideas
- low confidence
- low expectations
- afraid of failure

**Suggestions for inclusion as element of a teaching model**

- clear and consistent routines, familiar surroundings, structures
- clear indications of purpose of activities, teacher expectations
- careful use of language for instructions
- introduce independent/pair/group work activities, self assessment
- model and teach effective learning strategies
- use a range of teaching materials/resources
- use concrete, practical tasks
- provide explicit guidance in developing organisational system
- base learning on aural skills
- initially introduce literacy skills slowly, minimal input by print
- frequent change of pace/activities
- concrete, practical language, modelling, practical demonstrations
- error correction through modelling
### Non-roman script background

**Range of learner characteristics**

- Slower to learn
- Slower to complete literacy tasks
- Slower to learn script
- Have more to learn about writing, e.g., letter formation, line spacing
- Have different expectations of sound/letter relationship
- Develop different coping strategies

**Suggestions for inclusion as elements of a teaching model**

- Low intensity (50 hours)
- Literacy course for students of non-roman script background
- Small groups
- Slow pace
- Individualised instruction
- Computer-assisted learning facilities
- Adequate furniture, (e.g., tables and chairs)
- Teacher-models
- Practical tasks
- Meaningful content
- Adult materials
- Letter formation, grapho-phonics
- Awareness-raising
- Word-recognition
- Affects the teacher more than the learner
- Or
- No effect on learning
- Adaptable

### Refugee/survivor of torture/trauma

**Range of learner characteristics**

- Short attention span
- Lack concentration
- Poor memory
- High expectations of teacher and themselves
- High confidence
- Sometimes low educational background (LEB), sometimes high (HEB)

**Suggestions for inclusion as elements of a teaching model**

- Supportive teacher
- Structured routines
- Flexible approach
- Careful selection of materials
- Frequent change of activity
- Start at low intensity

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of learner characteristics</th>
<th>Suggestions for inclusion as elements of a teaching model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>physical, emotional and psychological suffering impedes learning</td>
<td>variety of extension materials and classroom resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>erratic learning</td>
<td>creative non-language activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>frustration interferes with learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsettled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preoccupied with family/settlement problems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health problems, frequently absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have difficulty adjusting to life in Australia</td>
<td>settlement focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack close family unit and support</td>
<td>bilingual counselling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolated</td>
<td>interpreter services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suspicious, anxious, on edge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wander in and out of classroom</td>
<td>counselling for learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low energy</td>
<td>counselling for teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hyperactive</td>
<td>training for teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack motivation</td>
<td>fewer face to face hours of teaching for teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dull, sleepy, depressed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affected by medication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensitive, easily upset</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggressive, hostile, ‘short fuse’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can’t relate to classmates or co-operate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ego-centred</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behaviour inappropriate to context of learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Older Learner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range of learner characteristics</th>
<th>Suggestions for inclusion as elements of a teaching model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tolerant</td>
<td>create context in which learners’ expertise is acknowledged and valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>willing to persevere</td>
<td>relevant, useful content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more realistic picture of life and learning</td>
<td>peer tutoring, cooperative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more flexible, have authority in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoy social aspects of being in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slower at writing</td>
<td>relaxed, unpressured pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes low educational background (LEB)</td>
<td>use traditional learning strategies which they are familiar with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prefer reading and writing activities</td>
<td>use familiar strategies, slowly expand their range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rely heavily on L1</td>
<td>restricted content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor concentration</td>
<td>clearly-structured materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor short term memory</td>
<td>clearly-structured processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequent change of activity, pace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>frequent revision and recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get tired easily</td>
<td>adequate classroom space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>