



Content-based learning strategies for learners with interrupted English

TAFE SA English Language Services, Adelaide

This program also relates to:

- Employment
- Health

TAFE SA English Language Services' *Adult Migrant English Program* offers English courses to help newly arrived refugees and migrants settle into life in South Australia. English Language Services also offers electives alongside the Certificate in Spoken and Written English.

English Language Services has established content-based learning courses that combine English language tuition with practical, appropriate training that will provide pathways to further study and employment. The program was designed to cater for a large number of newly arrived refugees living in Adelaide who have experienced disrupted education and/or lack of opportunities to gain meaningful education, training or work experience.

The content-based learning approach is used for courses in:

- Senior First Aid
- English for Driving Rules
- Information Technology Studies
- Aged Care.

The Senior First Aid and English for Driving Rules courses are funded through the *Adult Migrant English Program* (AMEP) by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship as part of the students' entitlement to 510 hours of English tuition.

The Information Technology Studies course is also funded under the AMEP but the Information Technology Studies Department of TAFE SA, which is funded by the South Australian Department of Further Education, Science and Technology, provides a subsidy.

The Aged Care course has been running since the beginning of 2007 and is open to everyone; including AMEP eligible learners. This allows English Language Services to draw on a variety of

students with the same needs to make a viable group. It is partly AMEP funded and partly state government funded.

TAFE SA English Language Services offers additional vocationally-oriented courses in Financial Services and Child Care through its South Australian State Government funding. These courses are specifically tailored to refugees and migrants, are taught by subject experts who are experienced in working with refugees and migrants, and English as a Second Language support is provided on a part-time basis. They provide a pathway for students who have completed their AMEP entitlement at Certificate 3 level and are suitable for students who have achieved an International Second Language Proficiency Rating 2 or above.

Identifying a need from grassroots feedback

Feedback from students prompted English Language Services to adopt a content-based learning approach. Many students did not feel they needed to study English. They would come back dejected six months later as a result of having experienced difficulties in other TAFE or university courses and really floundering because they had not had sufficient language support. The English Language Services courses were designed to give students the material and accreditation they wanted while providing vital English support.

Building on previous success

Many of the students had identified a desire to work in Community Services. The Senior First Aid course is a prerequisite for obtaining work in Aged Care and Child Care. Principal Lecturer, Amanda McKay, had set up a Senior First Aid Course with English support in the mid 1980s for Vietnamese and Cambodian refugee job seekers that had proven highly successful. She decided to use the model again.

The same content-based learning approach was adopted for the English for Driving Skills course in response to the needs of the students who included several single parent families headed by women.

In addition, many advertised positions, otherwise suitable for the students, require a driver's licence and the language of road rules is quite complex and difficult.

A content-based learning approach was adopted for Information Technology Studies as a result of witnessing the learning preferences of a large number of the 'Lost Boys of Sudan'. Most of these young men had extremely limited or no computing skills but were nonetheless very anxious to move into higher study quickly. They felt their English was adequate for further study and refused the offer of an English class, despite being entitled to free *Adult Migrant English Program* classes. Those students who had decided to study English spent long periods using computers in the study centre and skipped other classes to do so. TAFE lecturers in other subject areas indicated that these learners who had not taken up their English tuition entitlements were struggling with English when attempting other studies.

Content-based learning program

The English lecturers ensure that adequate English language support is provided in each course by taking time in class to explain vocabulary and supplying support materials. The students are also given additional English classes, pastoral care and career pathways support.

Students are informed that this is a different way to learn. Instead of learning English as the 'subject' they will be learning another subject, such as information technology, but doing it through English with English as a Second Language support. The English learning will occur less consciously because they will be focusing on the other subject area and will acquire English alongside the vocational skills they are learning.

Senior First Aid

This course is available to *Adult Migrant English Program* eligible students at Level 3 of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English. The teachers running the course have trained to become accredited Red Cross Senior First Aid trainers.

Some students have previously not had the opportunity to learn about the systems of the body and have sometimes been exposed to distorted views of conditions such as diabetes and epilepsy. The course educates them about these conditions and trains them to provide appropriate care.

The course is 35 hours in duration, compared with standard First Aid courses, which are 18 hours.

As many of the students progress to study aged care and sometimes also nursing, much of the program concentrates on developing vocabulary about symptoms and conditions, understanding body systems, and communicating in an emergency.

A resource kit with student books, PowerPoint slide shows, charts and a game has been developed.

English for Driving Rules

This course is offered as a two-hour elective once a week over a 10-week term and is taught by qualified English as a Second Language teachers at Levels 1, 2 and 3 of the Certificate in Spoken and Written English.

It is offered to students at all levels of their *Adult Migrant English Program* entitlement either at the English Language Services campus in Adelaide's Rundle Mall, or in community settings for students who cannot attend city classes. Students are encouraged to work together in language communities to enhance understanding of the concepts. The approach is to use simplified language as well as practical demonstration and practice with toy cars, road maps, photographs, and quiz cards to make it easier for students to become familiar with the rules. A student resource kit has been developed that includes:

- booklets for students
- photographs of intersections
- road signs and safety conditions
- flash cards with questions and solutions
- laminated intersections for students to use with toy cars
- overhead transparencies
- practice tests.

Information Technology Studies

The content-based information technology course comprises Certificate 2 in Information Technology Studies combined with Certificate 3 in Spoken and Written English in a one-semester full-time course within the Information Technology Studies Department at the TAFE SA Adelaide City Campus.

The course is run by several subject experts and a qualified English as a Second Language lecturer.

Students gain basic computer skills that enable them to participate more effectively in further study at TAFE or university, and in employment. They also gain an entry level qualification that entitles them to apply for further TAFE courses at Certificate 3 level, rather than having to compete with the general population for places in these courses. Those who go on to study Certificate 3 in Information Technology Studies have a pathway to, and credit towards, degree level information technology studies at the University of South Australia.

There is a selection procedure for Information Technology Studies because a high level of reading is needed to successfully meet the assessment requirements. Students who have never used a computer are advised to first undertake a 10-week term of study in the general Certificate 3 program where computer skills are introduced.

Aged Care

The Aged Care course consists of five modules of the Certificate 3 in Aged Care, a work experience component and English support. The English as a Second Language lecturer supports understanding of the content of the Aged Care course through team teaching with the subject experts. Work experience is a component of the course.

One of the most important aspects of this course is the exploration of differing cultural values to do with ageing. Appropriate communication methods are explored as well as the rights of the elderly in Australia.

Achievements

Content-based learning courses can be very exhilarating because students are learning a skill and something completely new. They have proven highly successful, with students queuing up to take classes.

Refugee students enrolled in such courses have made conscious efforts to take their studies very seriously. The number of students going on to take Aged Care or Child Care courses has been testament to the success of the Senior First Aid course. Through the course, students have also learnt about family nutrition. The Senior First Aid course is offered every term and always has a waiting list. Many of the students go on to study Aged Care.

Feedback from aged care facilities that take Aged Care students on placement is that residents like them (sometimes after a period of adjustment) because they have a respectful, caring manner. Outcomes have usually been excellent and the workplaces often employ the students at the end of their placement. At the end of the last course 14 out of 18 students found employment in Aged Care.

The refugee students' motivation is high. Information Technology Studies has proven very successful as many see studying information technology as a stepping-stone to other courses. Graduates from the information technology course have progressed to further TAFE study in Aged Care, Office Studies and Business Studies, as well as courses at university. Students have reported becoming the information technology experts within their communities and being in demand helping others learn the basics.

English for Driving Rules students have achieved excellent outcomes, with many passing the test to gain their learner's permit either during or at completion of the course. The classes have significantly helped single mothers, many of whom are refugee women on Woman at Risk visas, by giving them greater independence and confidence.

Lecturers have noted that students in classes with a content-based learning approach bond well and help each other, thus further improving their English competency and their opportunities for success.

Staff in the mainstream TAFE courses have been educated about the students' backgrounds and needs through the introduction of the content-based learning courses. In the past, some reacted to culturally and linguistically diverse students enrolling in their courses by simply referring them to the English language classes. They sometimes thought the refugees were international students. They now realise that the students are Australian permanent residents who are finding it difficult studying English and need content-based learning courses and structures in place to help them.

Many lecturers are enjoying the new approach. Information technology lecturer, Stuart McIntyre, said:

It's just a pleasure to come in and teach this class. We have to kick them out at the end of the session. As a teacher it's really rewarding.



Profile > Aster

Aster, a refugee from the Horn of Africa, elected to study Senior First Aid as part of her Certificate 3 in Spoken and Written English at TAFE SA.

The First Aid course will help her find work, perhaps in the aged care sector, or it may help her in further studies. As well as providing information about various illnesses and how to treat them, the course has helped Aster learn more about venomous creatures in Australia and what to do if she or her family is bitten.

She finds the different learning approach, where English as a Second Language teachers help her understand first aid terminology and language, very beneficial. Aster said:

In each elective we learn English. Each subject has its own language. I've learnt a lot of words about myself – about my body. I'm getting a lot of confidence learning about medicine. I've found it interesting for me personally as I can explain what's happening to me. When I had success I became more confident and I can do anything!

photo > First Aid students Aster and Triphana with lecturer Pamela Marlow

The new pathway for students who are struggling in class with language difficulties has increased awareness among lecturers about other obstacles to learning. Lecturers are starting to identify students presenting with a range of learning and psychological issues and are seeking more information about what help is available.

Challenges

Lecturers have noticed that while some students are competent English speakers they still need help with reading and writing English. The emphasis on learning the subject skills can make it difficult for the English as a Second Language lecturer to find the time to work on developing reading and writing skills.

TAFE SA English Language Services would like to run more vocational courses but running joint courses requires commitment from other TAFE departments and/or funding from outside the *Adult Migrant English Program*, usually from the state government. In addition, running intensive courses like this for several vocational skill areas can strain resources due to the number of students required to make a viable group.

Key messages and advice for setting up a similar project

To ensure the project's success, propose the first course as a pilot, make it a priority, and thoroughly support it so it can be replicated without encountering any unexpected problems. To secure management support for the program, select students who you expect will make the pilot a success. Be prepared to run the first course with a smaller number of students than might be desirable or viable in the long term.

Ensure all stakeholders are committed by emphasising the benefits of the program to students, training providers and the Australian community. Explain carefully to managers the reasons the course needs to be supported.

Select staff carefully. They must be prepared to give 100 per cent and be fully committed to the methodology. The English as a Second Language lecturers need to be diplomatic when working with staff from other subject areas because they will need to suggest appropriate methodologies for the students.

Establish good processes for advertising, recruiting students, and reporting the success of the program. Monitor these processes and be prepared to adjust them as necessary.

Advertise widely for the first course. Use existing contacts in the target communities. For further courses ask past students to spread the word. Be aware that the client group will change from course to course and may need different advertising, selection procedures and support.

Ensure students understand what credentials will be awarded on successful completion of the course, and what the credential means in real terms. For instance, it is important to explain that completion of the English for Driving Rules course will not result in students gaining a driver's licence.

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