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MEETING DIVERSE NEEDS: CONTENT-BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING AND SETTLEMENT NEED FOR LOW LITERACY ADULT ESL IMMIGRANTS³

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1 Introduction

Teachers of LESLLA learners face the challenge of assisting their learners to develop language and literacy skills, while also supporting the significant learning needs faced by learners in coming to understand their new social and cultural environment. In this chapter we describe some examples of how content-based language teaching has been developed and applied to LESLLA learners in the Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP) in Australia, to meet these challenges.

Content-based language teaching (CBLT)⁴ has been developed and applied in academic settings in schools, colleges and universities for more than two decades (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989, Crandall 1986, Kasper 2000). However, while the focus of most work in CBLT has been within the context of formal education, there are also examples of work done in community settings, for example Mohan's use of an adult community ESL class working on automobile insurance to illustrate his knowledge frameworks approach to CBLT (Mohan 1986).

CBLT is concerned with concurrently teaching an area of learning (often referred to as a topic) as well as language. The content provides both a context for language learning, and the language learned also enables learners to communicate about the particular topic. Language learning includes the types of texts and other features of the language often used in dealing with specific content in particular contexts. Examples include topics like the construction of a simple electric circuit with accompanying instructions for beginning English learners in a secondary school.

CBLT incorporates various approaches to language teaching and shares much with English for specific purposes, text-based approaches to teaching and to some extent situational language learning. However it is also distinctive from similar approaches in that it involves the teaching of content; the teaching of language in an interplay between the elements of the language curriculum and the content curriculum (Snow Met & Genesee 1989).

The literature on CBLT consistently reports positive responses from students and teachers. Advantages reported include learners' satisfaction in learning two things at once, increased learner motivation, development of contextually located language skills, learning that connects learners with their new social context and opportunities for learners to communicate about their existing knowledge and skills (see Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989 and Brinton & Master 1997).

There is no single approach or methodology in CBLT, but there are similarities in the different approaches that are used. Content-based teaching is usually based on visual input of content taught through realia, pictures, charts or diagrams. This input is related to texts on the topic that are authentic to the style of language used in dealing with the content. This is supplemented with exploration and practice of such texts and the language features used, and at times further exploration of the content. Most approaches also involve opportunities to explore aspects of learning, such as Chamot &

³ The project reported here was conducted by the AMEP (Adult Migrant English Programme) Research Centre, which is funded by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The authors wish to express their gratitude to DIAC for and the AMEP research Centre for supporting and funding the project, and to the participating teachers and students, who very generously gave their time and experience.

⁴ In North America it is generally referred to as 'content-based instruction' (CBI).

O'Malley's attention to learning strategies in their Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (Chamot & O'Malley 1994).

2 Context

In recent years the number of LESLLA learners has grown in Australia in response to the increasing need for resettlement of refugees from Africa and the Middle East, and more recently South East Asia. The proportion of LESLLA learners has therefore increased significantly in the AMEP, the national programme which provides ESL instruction for recently-arrived immigrants.

AMEP teachers and providers have a long tradition of relating English language teaching to the settlement needs and context of AMEP learners. Language is usually presented in the context of situations and conversations learners are likely to participate in within the Australian community. Information about settlement related services is often provided by teachers and AMEP service providers, at times in the learners' first languages by bilingual aides. Australian ESL teachers also have a history of working with low literacy learners (the term used in Australia for LESLLA learners) since the 1980s, although earlier approaches (Hoy 1987, Ramm 1994) tended to focus on what Street (1993) terms the 'autonomous' literacy skills, with less systematic attention to Street's 'ideological' dimensions of literacy', that relate to the significance of different texts and the expectations and conventions associated with written texts (Street 1993).

The curriculum framework used in the AMEP (the Certificates in Spoken and Written English - CSWE AMES NSW 2008) has also been adjusted to meet the changing clientele of the AMEP with a *Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English* for low literacy and non-literate learners to precede four conventional certificate levels. This level not only is intended to provide teaching that is more closely attuned to the needs of LESLLA learners, but also aims to provide more realistic steps that are achievable for these learners. This course enables more accurate measurement and recognition of progress made by LESLLA students that was not captured by the more complex competency descriptions in the original Certificate 1.

3 LESLLA learners and CBLT

The literature on content-based language teaching makes only limited mention of working with low literacy learners (see Hoy 1987, Kaspar 2000). However, previous successful experience of using CBLT in other contexts (see Williams 1987) and the experience of using a content-based approach with low literacy learner drivers in the AMEP suggest it can be both possible and useful to adopt such approaches with low literacy learners, for the following reasons:

- the highly contextualized language and learning tasks of a content-based approach provides a concrete basis for learning that assists low literacy learners in their learning;
- teaching topics helps LESLLA students learn about and better understand their new environment;
- a variety of learning tasks the opportunity to develop literacy skills and relate spoken and written language;
- teaching can address content areas of interest identified by learners.

Although CBLT has generally been devised and applied in the context of formal schooling, and often in a college or university context, there are reasons why it offers considerable potential for low literacy learners.

4 The appropriate topic content for low literacy⁵ learners projects

In response to increasing concerns by teachers in the AMEP about how to best meet the needs of LESLLA learners, and building on an earlier project in which LESLLA learners learnt relevant language and road rules in preparation for driving license tests (Hemming, Sydorneko, Lloyd & Murray, 2004), the AMEP Research Centre included a project focused on the development of content-based materials for low literacy learners in its 2005-6 research activity programme.

The project involved similar activities focused on two groups of LESLLA learners, younger learners ages 18 to 24, and LESLLA learners 25 and over. Both projects involved the same activities:

- an initial stage where low literacy learners and experienced teachers of low literacy learners were interviewed, with a view to identifying areas of content that were of particular interest or relevance to these learners;
- Workshops and follow up preparation time in which teachers developed content-based materials to use with their learners followed by the teachers trialling their materials with a class. This use of the materials was documented through teacher journals, classroom observations of some trials, interviews with the teachers, and some group interviews with learners (conducted through interpreters);
- a third phase in which teachers shared their materials with other teachers in another part of the country, to be trialled with other classes to identify the extent to which such materials can be shared by teachers, and issues involved in transferring these materials across different learning contexts.

The first stage revealed that LESLLA learners were interested in content that helped them to understand aspects of life in Australia. These findings and the insights of teachers working in the project were used to identify the focus of the materials the project teachers developed. Table 1 presents an overview of the topics developed by project teachers working with each group of LESLLA learners.

Table 1: Units produced by teachers in the *Appropriate topic content projects 2005-6*

Older learners	Younger (ages 18 to 24) learners
<p><i>Australia</i> An introduction to the city in which the students live (Melbourne), and other parts of Australia.</p> <p><i>The Australian hospital system</i> Based on a visit to a local public hospital, these materials helped learners to use the public health services available in their area.</p> <p><i>Op-shopping</i> Explored shopping in opportunity shops (thrift shops or charity shops) as an economical means of obtaining essential needs such as clothing and household items.</p> <p><i>Budgeting</i> Exploring strategies and advice for managing finances, to take account of factors such as seasonal variations in energy bills and ways to plan how to</p>	<p><i>Using the internet to find out about jobs and occupations</i> Use of the internet to find essential information about the nature of duties or tasks, training requirements and demand for different occupational groups.</p> <p><i>Australian culture through soap opera incidents (Neighbours)</i> Exploring aspects of Australian culture through critical incidents in the TV soap opera 'Neighbours' including discussing what was observed with practices and expectations in learners' countries of origin.</p> <p><i>Nutrition and fast food</i> An exploration of nutritional issues related to high consumption of fast food, based on scenes from a documentary movie 'Supersize Me'.</p> <p><i>Understanding mobile phones</i></p>

⁵ This is the usual term used for LESLLA learners in Australia.

<p>cover household expenses. <i>Stay Safe readers</i> Three readers on safety in different parts of the home. (See below) <i>The world of work</i> These materials were computer based and explored language associated with different occupations, places of work and the nature of work done by people working in different occupations.</p>	<p>Learners explore information about using mobile phones, including different payment and charge plans, texting and so on.</p>
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These teaching materials are available as *Living in Australia* materials accessible from http://www.ameprc.mq.edu.au/resources/professional_development_resources

As a result of the teachers developing, using and sharing these materials, the data collected from the teachers and their students revealed that:

- younger low literacy learners were much more adventurous and prepared to take risks in their learning behaviour, than older learners. They were more willing to explore content which contained difficult language, and were often interested in learning more, while older learners tended to prefer to work within well defined and ‘safe’ tasks, in terms of being able to succeed at what they were asked to do;
- the outcomes achieved by all learners were usually higher than their teachers originally expected;
- the teachers preferred to follow their own insights in constructing their teaching materials, rather than utilising an existing framework provided in the CBLT literature (such as Mohan 1986, Chamot & O’Malley 1994, or Stoller & Grabe 1997);
- while the preparation of content-based materials was time consuming, the teachers were able to produce effective and motivating content-based learning materials that led to effective learning of content, language and literacy skills.

The ways in which this happened are exemplified in the following section, which provides an account of the experiences of three teachers in the project, working with older literacy learners. The materials they developed were called the *Stay Safe Readers*, and dealt with safety in the home.

5 *The Stay Safe readers: Context and experience of learners and teachers*

Three teachers involved in the project, Christine Adby, Laura Chapman and Leanne Zuvich, were working in the AMEP at the Institute of TAFE Tasmania, with a high proportion of refugee clients, of whom a significant number were LESLLA learners. The teachers had previously developed materials for these learners, and shared an interest in developing more accessible materials that would enable a greater level of content to be delivered to these learners. The Appropriate Topic Content project provided an opportunity for the teachers to both develop content-based materials and trial CBLT approaches.

Content-based materials were developed for trialling across three small Preliminary CSWE AMEP classes. In total 33 refugee and humanitarian students participated in the trial, from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Kenya, Burundi, and Sierra Leone, with one student from Iran. Ages ranged from early 20s to early 70s, with the majority being in their mid forties to mid fifties. The majority of students (26) were women including one women-only class, with 7 men participating in the other classes. At the beginning of the trial the learners had spent between one and fourteen months in the AMEP.

Thirty of the students had no previous schooling on commencing the AMEP, two had three years of schooling and one student had five years. Twenty-nine students had an entry level of no recordable English proficiency across the skills of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing). All learners were identified as Band A (slow paced) through their initial assessment interview. Around half of the learners were identified as having additional special needs, either from departmental information regarding health issues, needs identified in initial interview or teacher observation. The teachers noted that this specific group appeared to have particular difficulty learning even within the Preliminary SWE course.

Some of the characteristics of these learners warranting particular consideration in the appropriate topic content project were:

- learners' lack of familiarity with classrooms and formal learning
- an imbalance between their literacy and oral/aural skills
- the struggle of literacy learning in a second language
- a need to make use of informal learning strategies
- the need for explicit teaching of learning skills
- learners tend to learn through concrete tasks
- learners require much repetition and slow paced delivery.

(Allender :1998; Nichols and Sangster :1996; McPherson :1997)

6 *The development of content-based readers*

The teachers identified a strong need for recently arrived refugees to learn about safety in their new environments because students were suffering the consequences of minimal awareness of safety in the home. There were cases of students and their family members sustaining various injuries, both minor and severe emergency cases. During the winter months in Tasmania, home heating brought up a range of safety issues for these learners, many of whom had limited experience with heating appliances and equipment. Community groups and service providers working with newly arrived refugees had also identified education around home safety as a significant settlement need at a family and community level.

This need, combined with the teachers' view that there was a lack of content-based materials suitable for this target group in terms of skill level and cultural appropriateness, motivated the teachers to address the topic of safety in the home. In order to develop a new learning resource, the teachers aimed to identify situations and target language that would reflect students' real life experiences and therefore provide the context and motivation for "a more socially contextualised learning" to take place (Sangster, 2002:14). The teachers therefore decided to develop content-based readers to provide content information, and other supplementary materials for classroom use to provide a range of learning activities based on the readers.

A key element of the materials was that the characters be representative of people in the refugee community - appropriate cultural role models with whom the students could identify. As the great majority of the students at that time were African, the main characters were portrayed by a Sudanese woman and her child living in Hobart. It was equally important that these actors understood the purpose behind the books and were enthusiastic about the project.

7 *Considerations in the design of useable materials*

In designing the materials the teachers needed to consider issues related to delivering complex content to LESLLA learners who often have difficulty identifying abstract graphic representation and culturally-bound imagery (Achren 1991; Allender 1998; Ramm 1994; Sangster 2002). They therefore ensured that visual aids were appropriate and transparent (Allender, 1998) and all graphics were simple, contextualised and

realistic (Ramm, 1994). Images were expected to be instrumental in conveying the content and needed to be clear and uncluttered to support the texts rather than present ambiguities. In considering the visual literacy aspect of the materials, it was decided that colour photographs were the clearest and most practical means of expressing the visual content. A photo shoot was set up in a private house to provide visuals of safety practices that were as close as possible to the original text.

Worksheets accompanying the readers relied heavily on photographs, had minimal information on each page, and used an enlarged *Comic Sans* font as it is clear and similar to handwriting. Colour and symbols were incorporated to highlight safe and unsafe practices by the use of green ticks (check marks) and red crosses. This colour symbolism was tied into other uses, with green for 'safe' or 'go', such as with a "Walk" symbol, and red for 'danger' or 'fire'.

To engage the learners through a more "hands on" methodology (Allender, 1998; Nichols and Sangster, 1996) flashcards, matching activities and picture cards were developed for a range of uses. Activities were designed to engage learners in manual dexterity tasks such as manipulating realia or cutting and pasting pictures and sentences. All the activities were put on CDs and the school intranet to allow teachers to adapt and print activities for these purposes.

The teachers recognised that many of the low level students lacked confidence in learning and so wanted to ensure that resources were "presented in a way which built in success" (Badenhorst, 1994:69). They were mindful of the need for constant revision and recycling of language, skills and content. Learners with minimal schooling also have difficulty with transferral strategies, so it was considered important to move language and learning skills from one context to another (Ramm, 1994; Badenhorst, 1994). These concepts were built into the design of the materials through recycling of language and content to assist learners with retention, developing formal learning skills, recognising language patterns and building confidence (Huntington, 1992; Ramm, 1994; Hajnkl, 1994). The broad range of activities also enabled teachers to fulfil individual students' needs and preferences in independent learning arrangements.

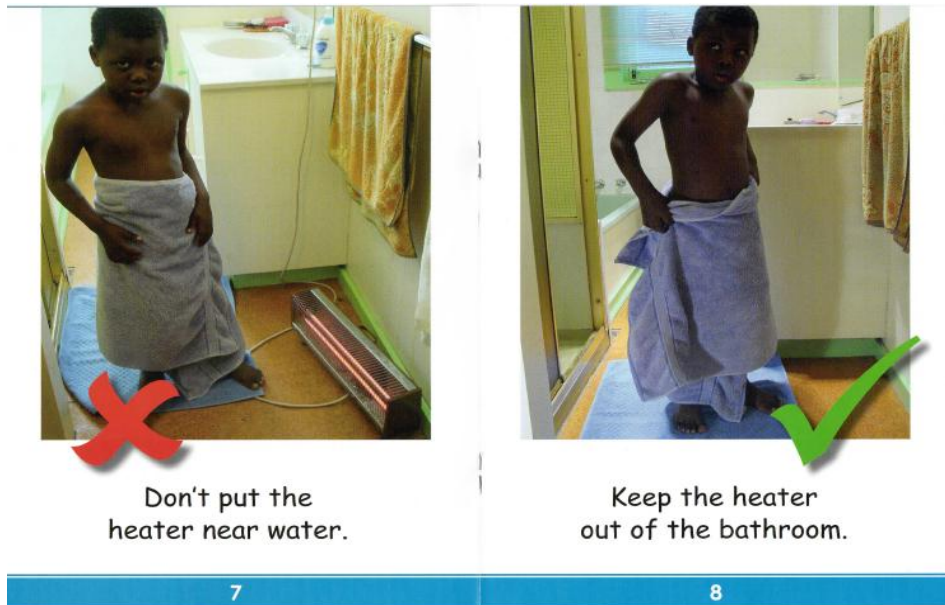
8 *Overview of the readers*

Readers were chosen as the core of the teaching materials for their manageable, compact, and versatile format for use in a range of settings. Students could take the readers home to extend learning beyond the classroom. Readers were also preferred for their potential in literacy development, from the basic skills of handling a book, reading left to right and top to bottom of the page. It was hoped that the learners in the trial would begin to conceptualise or read sentences and, for some, manage a whole text in the form of a book for the first time. While the teachers found that simple books proved exceedingly popular as students gained a great sense of achievement from reading them, they were not able to find published readers with safety content for low literacy adult learners.

In the development stages, the writers compiled specific content by drawing on anecdotes from students and from information forums with other settlement services.. They researched existing home safety resources such as community information brochures, internet sites and educational resources. In writing the key texts of the resource, it was necessary to balance the content and language without compromising the safety message or placing unreasonable language and literacy demands on the learners. The safety information was broken down into very simple imperative instructions, each tied to a tick (√) or cross (X) symbol to indicate safe or unsafe practices.

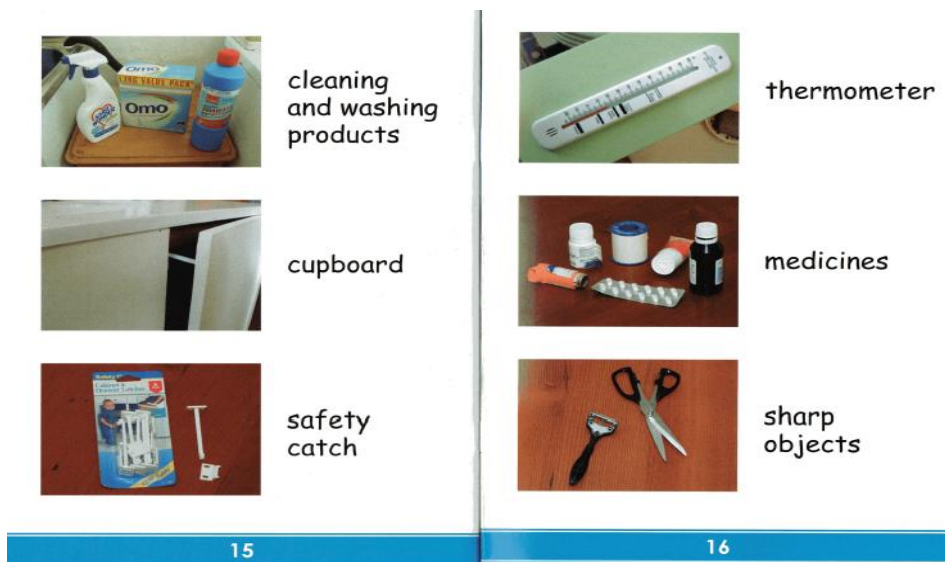
The final resource was a set of three readers categorised by safety theme: The Kitchen, The Bedroom and Living Room, and the Bathroom and Laundry. Each book began with a contextualising page of the location, such as the kitchen, followed by a simple format of one instruction or piece of advice under a photo on each page (see Picture 1 below). At the end of the books two to three pages were devoted to key

vocabulary from the texts (Picture 2). The readers were written with a view to clearly conveying content, providing a clear and strong language model, and being a basis for language and literacy learning activities.



Picture 1: Sample pages from *Stay Safe: The Bathroom and Laundry*

Concepts for additional materials arose during the trial as the teaching and learning cycle fed an evolving process of materials development. Needs arising in the classroom demanded more individualised resources for each learner group, such as simplified or personalised texts and various extension activities. This led to a sharing of activities and methods that were proving successful with each class, and these were in turn written into further activities to be trialled. Throughout the process the writers scaffolded both individual tasks and the unit of work as a whole to support learner development in a logical progression and create a cohesive collection of resources (Hammond and Gibbons, 2005).



Picture 2: Sample vocabulary page from *Stay Safe: The Bathroom and Laundry*

The project teachers developed a set of classroom work sheets and materials based on the readers. The activities were designed to recycle skills and support the students' language and literacy in a variety of ways for different learner groups and to provide an initial introduction to activity types for newer arrival learners. Accompanying resources included worksheets, flash cards, vocabulary matching card sets, Language Master cards and an audio CD. When they were drafted it was clear to the teachers that they could be used for a wide range of classroom tasks and activities, which are listed in the following section.

9 *Teaching the materials*

The classroom trials were conducted over four weeks, with intensity varying from 3.5 hours a day for two days per week to 3.5 hours a day for four days, depending on class timetabling. Two classes were taught on campus and one was taught in a community setting with adjunct childcare. The extent to which materials were used, and the manner in which they were used, varied across the three classes and different learner levels. However, the teachers adapted a common approach to content-based instruction that they felt best addressed the needs of low literacy learners. This involved a broad range of activity types that were repeated with varying content, the use of key texts in multiple forms, extensive use of visuals, opportunities for guided individual learning and practical components.

Examples of activities used across the three classes were:

- snap, bingo, 'go fish' and memory games with card sets
- using picture cards as prompts for question and answer activities, spoken procedures, joint construction of oral texts and discussions.
- word attack activities focussing on syllables and spelling/sound relationships.
- pronunciation activities, especially focussing on syllables
- cut up sentences for reconstruction and syntax activities
- cut up texts such as procedures for sequencing
- cross and tick / unsafe and safe matching activities with pictures
- cloze activities with whole texts and procedures
- formulaic spoken language of asking for and giving information through surveys and spoken Q and A
- completing surveys with simplified ticks and crosses or words
- vocabulary activities such as picture/vocab matching, and cut up or jumbled words
- individual learning of vocabulary and pronunciation with Language Masters
- listen and repeat activities and listen and read with the audio CD
- pre-reading activities involving prediction, vocab building and oral texts based on images

The teachers also made the content concrete to learners by providing practical or experiential lessons. The classes participated in practicums in student kitchens and in a kitchen specifically set up for students with special needs studying in TAFE.⁶ Safety procedures, risks and dangers were demonstrated in the kitchen environment and constantly reinforced with spoken language. Vocabulary was recycled and introduced as

⁶ Technical and Further Education, a vocational training institute, the equivalent of a polytechnic in the UK.

it arose, both orally and on visual signs around the kitchen. During the process of demonstrating procedures and activity types, teachers focused on developing the language of instruction in context. This follows Hood's findings that preliterate learners relate most strongly to context-embedded oral language (1990).

Informal learners learn through observation and imitation (Ramm, 1994), and therefore the explicit demonstration of safety procedures with the use of realia and photographs was very effective. In this 'real life' context students were able to demonstrate their understanding and teachers could identify both levels of practical knowledge and learning needs in relation to language and literacy development.

The teachers were aware that language experience approaches had proven highly successful with preliterate learners (Huntington, 1992). The practical sessions led to much oral/aural work back in the classroom relating to safety procedures or students' personal experiences. As these students were generally from highly oral cultures, we found they responded well to speaking activities involving repetition and rhythm (Sangster, 2002) and joint construction of oral texts (Nicholas and Williams, 2003). Spoken language was used as a basis for class compositions of written procedures and recounts. Other valuable literacy work grew out of extension work based on photographs of signs in the kitchens.

By placing a strong emphasis on an integrated skills approach, students could capitalise on their skill strengths to support weaker areas. Students also supported each other through working in a range of groupings such as pairs, small groups, or in combined classes to focus on areas of need or interest. Where appropriate, students were encouraged to use their first language to explain content or procedures to each other as a foundation for language work.

Bilingual and bicultural assistants were used with some students at the commencement of the trial, and with all students in the evaluation process. At the time of the trial, classes had minimal access to bilingual support due to the disparity of cultures and languages in the classes. Teachers felt it would have been beneficial to deliver the materials with more bilingual support to enable students with minimal English oracy to voice their safety concerns and discuss experiences in more depth. More use of bilingual assistance would also give the students further opportunities to clarify understandings of content, language and learning processes, and allow ongoing evaluation throughout the trial.

10 *Outcomes of teaching*

10.1 *Language and Literacy development*

The materials exceeded the teachers' expectations in regard to student interest, motivation and both knowledge and skills development. The familiarity and relevance of the content was hugely motivating and promoted a lot of discussion, so students' engagement was high from the beginning of the trial. The students responded positively to the range of resources and activities, and when a new resource was introduced, such as the audio CD, they were motivated to extend their language.

The teachers involved in the project observed a significant level of achievement across language, literacy and learning skills in all classes. Although specific data on language and literacy development were not collected in the short timeframe, teachers observed that learners were competent on a range of language and literacy tasks they had formerly been unable to achieve, and noted learners' increased confidence in participating in a range of activities. Even the recognition of some key vocabulary and how to handle a book was a major achievement for the lowest level learners. Researchers noted that some students who had initially entered the course at "preliterate" level could actually read complex words such as 'electrocute' and 'appliance'. After extensive scaffolding and repetition, some learners were reading quite extensive texts both individually and collaboratively by the end of the trial.

The students' ability to read authentic texts and to recognise the relevance of this learning in their personal lives contributed immensely to their sense of achievement. No doubt such success with authentic language was a large factor in the continued level of motivation as classes broadened their learning into different safety sub-topics. Students were also thrilled to be able to read and gain meaning from signs "for Australian people" and so the unanticipated inclusion of these authentic texts really enhanced the content of the unit of work. The Stay Safe materials also demonstrated to learners that books can contain practical content applicable to daily life.

10.2 Learning skills development

A further goal of the materials was to assist students in becoming familiar with classroom activities, procedures and resources. Through this unit of work the students used a range of resources and participated in a variety of activity types that were repeated across the books. Teachers observed that students gradually began to transfer skills and knowledge across topics and adapt more quickly to new activities with similar tasks. Even some of the slower paced, 'teacher-dependent' learners were using some of these materials independently or chose to work on them in guided individual learning sessions in the Flexible Learning Centre.⁷

10.3 Demonstration of content knowledge and practical skills

The feedback from the learners in relation to content was very positive, with many students able to articulate content they had learned through interpreters at a group evaluation of the trial. Low level learners were able to differentiate between safe and unsafe situations in photographs and demonstrations. They were also able to demonstrate safe practices using realia in the classroom and resources in student kitchens. With bilingual support, the students were able to discuss how this content was relevant to their lives. The discussions that arose indicated a high level of engagement with both the concepts and the language.

The materials had elicited a lot of anecdotes from students about accidents in their homes and even past experience in their countries of origin. Being able to identify how these incidents could be prevented shows how much they had learned about content. This learning also enabled students to overcome unreasonable fears that they had in relation to electrical appliances, for example, learning that most smoke alarms do not have active currents, and therefore contain batteries that can safely be changed.

The students were now putting their learning into practice by discussing solutions to safety issues in their homes. An equally important achievement was that many students were using English to communicate these ideas, and related simple content back to teachers without the use of interpreters. The success of the trials emphasised the importance of integrating relevant settlement content into appropriate language and literacy materials. The trials also showed that the teaching of detailed content *is* achievable with really low language and literacy students, provided there is appropriate scaffolding and support.

10.4 Materials outcomes

The materials offered the flexibility to be used in a variety of ways across a range of teaching contexts and learner levels. These resources have been successfully utilised in classrooms, the Flexible Learning Centre, guided individual learning sessions and in a community setting. Several students asked if they could take the books home to read

⁷ The Flexible Learning Centre (FLC) is a learning and teaching area that provides a range of specialised resources and technical support for independent and flexible learning. It differs from Independent Learning Centres in that it also caters for low literacy and special needs learners to reduce teacher dependence and diversify programme delivery

and demonstrate safety procedures to their children. They reported back that the books were very helpful in reinforcing safety concerns around the house.

Students also responded very positively to and identified with the African role models in the photographs. African learners reported that they used the parent in the books as an example of someone in their community for teaching their own children about safety. It is also of note that, although the numbers of men in the trial groups were significantly small, and much content focused on domestic issues around the home, the men appeared equally interested in the materials and participated enthusiastically in the units of work.

The teacher-produced readers were considered of sufficient standard and relevance that they were commercially published under the title of *Stay Safe: The kitchen, Stay Safe: The bathroom and laundry* and *Stay Safe: The living room and bedroom* (Adby, Chapman & Zuvich 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). As a commercial publication, they have been disseminated to teachers in other parts of Australia and internationally.

The AMEP in Hobart incorporates much settlement content into language programmes, and such content is a strong basis for syllabus design across the centre. Integrated Language CBI courses have also been run in specific areas such as learner driving, food handling and kitchen operations, enrolled nursing, work placement and experience, horticulture, First Aid and industrial machining. The success of the Stay Safe project has given staff further impetus to look at means of developing content-based materials for low literacy learners and establishing a community of practice to facilitate a more comprehensive approach to integrating language, literacy and content.

11 Conclusions

The work described here illustrates the possibilities and value of using content based teaching with low literacy ESL learners. The experiences of participants and the findings of the projects suggest that CBI can be a powerful and effective approach for developing LESLLA learners' content knowledge and skills relevant to the lives they are making for themselves in a new country. It also provides a context for the development of second language and literacy skills in areas of relevance for learners and produces high levels of engagement for learners. Content-based materials and teaching provide scaffolding that enables teachers to give learners opportunities for meaningful use of target language and literacy skills. They also provide contexts for stimulating and valuable opportunities for practice and extension of skills.

These developments illustrate the potential of content-based approaches in assisting teachers to meet the complex and diverse language and literacy learning needs of LESLLA learners in ways that connect with their new social environment and contribute to their empowerment in that context.

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