

LESLLA Symposium Proceedings



Recommended citation of this article

Williams, A., & Murray, D. E. (2010). Get Wise: Content-Based Teaching for LESLLA Refugee Youth in Adult Programs. *LESLLA Symposium Proceedings*, 5(1), 15–24.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8004047>

Citation for LESLLA Symposium Proceedings

This article is part of a collection of articles based on presentations from the 2009 Symposium held at Bow Valley College in Banff, Alberta, Canada. Please note that the year of publication is often different than the year the symposium was held. We recommend the following citation when referencing the edited collection.

Wall, T., & Leong, M. (Eds.) (2010). Low-educated adult second language and literacy Acquisition (LESLLA): Proceedings of the 5th symposium. Bow Valley College.

<https://lesllasp.journals.publicknowledgeproject.org/index.php/lesllasp/issue/view/470>

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***Get Wise*: CONTENT-BASED TEACHING FOR LESLLA REFUGEE YOUTH IN ADULT PROGRAMS**

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1 Introduction

Get Wise is a set of multi-media teaching materials developed within the Australian Adult Migrant² English Program (AMEP) for low literacy refugee youth and young adult learners. The materials illustrate how a content-based approach can contribute to the learning of English language, literacy and content relevant to the lives of older adolescent and young adult LESLLA learners. While the *Get Wise* materials were the outcome of a large well-funded project, they demonstrate strategies that can be applied locally by teachers working to meet the needs of older adolescent and young adult LESLLA learners, regardless of the level of funding.

2 The Australian context

There are significant numbers of younger learners (aged between 16 and 24) in the AMEP, which is a settlement program that provides ESL instruction to new and recently arrived adult immigrants across Australia. The AMEP is funded by the federal Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and provides up to 510 hours free ESL tuition to learners in certain categories (generally refugee and humanitarian intake immigrants³). Learners with special needs such as difficult pre-immigration experiences may be eligible for an additional 100 hours of instruction. In 2004, this was expanded for young learners (16-24) with seven or fewer years of schooling, who were entitled to up to 400 hours additional tuition in the AMEP. These additional programs are called the Special Preparatory Program (SPP). The AMEP is delivered by a number of different providers across the country, who have been contracted by DIAC through a competitive grant process. AMEP providers are required to work within a national framework, the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE). The CSWE curriculum is outcome based, with learner achievement assessed through their performance of competencies. The framework has a number of levels, including a preliminary stage that acknowledges the low literacy levels of some learners (NSW AMES 2003).

Many young learners are therefore from refugee backgrounds and have had limited or interrupted experiences of formal schooling. Their social circumstances can be varied. They are often living with their families, while in some cases they have arrived in Australia independently and have no family with them. In some cases

² In Australia, "migrant" is used to refer to immigrants or refugees coming to Australia.

³ Professional and employment and family reunion immigrants are required to pay a fee to access the AMEP. The amount is based on the level of proficiency in English of the Principal applicant in a family group.

they have moved away from their families and are living independently. Their characteristics as learners in AMEP classrooms often make them noticeably different from their older peers in their classrooms. They tend to have a very strong orientation to peers of their age group and an awareness of various aspects of youth culture that are not of great interest to older learners. Younger learners are often less able to formulate goals for themselves and are often less aware of options open to them and pathways to access and achieve goals they may have. For young refugee learners with limited formal education, as well as limited English language and literacy skills, accessing mainstream vocational training and education is a challenge.

While some older adolescent refugee students may access schools (this is mainly an option for relatively younger learners aged under 18), this is often not a successful pathway because of the high expectations associated with the final years of secondary schooling. Therefore many younger refugee learners gravitate to the adult sector, sometimes after an unsuccessful experience in a school. These learners usually have a verbal fluency with spoken language that far exceeds their skills with written language. They also tend to learn more quickly (especially spoken language) than the older learners in their class.

In many cases, AMEP classes include learners of all ages, and may have a wide age range. In some places there are concentrations of younger learners, and providers are able to include dedicated youth oriented classes. AMEP classes generally work toward the language specified goals and objectives of the CSWE, but content is not prescribed. The CSWE specified language is often contextualized in content related to the settlement needs and circumstances of its adult learners. However, younger learners do not always relate so easily to such information, which assumes a certain amount of life experience and self-awareness in the formulation of goals.

3 *The curriculum challenge: What is suitable for this group of learners?*

The nature of this group of learners presents challenges for the teachers and AMEP providers working with them. The learners often have less formal knowledge than their peers who have greater experience of formal schooling, and less knowledge and experience of the world than their older classmates. They have gaps in their knowledge of aspects of life in their new country. However, they often have an eagerness to learn and are motivated and adaptive learners who can learn some things (especially spoken language) at a relatively fast pace, while written-based tasks can be more challenging. They are often interested in and relate to trends and interests of younger adults and have an interest in, but limited experience of, new technologies as a means of social interaction and entertainment. An extensive research study of such young people from Africa (who represent between one half and two thirds of these learners in the AMEP) found that providers nominated the following priorities for instruction to these learners: literacy; numeracy; settlement issues, including Australian culture and knowledge of educational pathways, and learning to learn (Murray & Lloyd, 2008, p. 14). Furthermore, the study noted that young people preferred being with like-minded young people, needed classes focused on pathways for young people and a youth-oriented methodology.

These learners need a curriculum that will provide them with engagement and motivation, as earlier studies in the AMEP suggested that younger low literacy learners are inclined to lose motivation and drop out relatively easily if they feel their needs are not attended to (Wigglesworth 2003). Curriculum for these learners needs to generate engagement and motivation, as well as developing English language skills, literacy (and numeracy) skills and contribute to their knowledge of the new society. These young LESLLA learners also need to develop more self-autonomy and self-awareness as learners. The *Get Wise* project sought to produce curriculum materials that would achieve these goals and be useable within the varied contexts of AMEP provision.

4 The Get Wise Project

Following other projects in the AMEP in which content-based approaches had produced high levels of engagement and successful language learning outcomes (Hemming et. al. 2004, Williams, 2004) the AMEP Research Centre (AMEP RC) proposed content-based curriculum modules as a way of meeting the needs of young LESLLA learners in the SPP component of the AMEP. The materials had to be compatible with the AMEP curriculum and program organization frameworks and be of particular value for use in classes including SPP youth learners.

4.1 Development of the Get Wise modules

Following DIAC's acceptance of the proposal and agreement to fund it, the concept and guiding principles for the materials were developed in consultation with a national working group which included representatives of AMEP providers and experts outside the AMEP who had experience of working with the target group of learners (such as teachers with experience of adolescent low literacy learners in the school sector). This group met early in the project to consider and advise on the format and content of the materials proposed by the AMEP RC team working on the project.

A team of experienced ESL materials writers was recruited to work on the materials. This team included a writer with scriptwriting experience and a teacher with demonstrated experience in working with this group of learners. The whole writing team met to develop the general content and structure of the modules, and members of the writing team worked on designated modules. The writing team member with script writing experience developed the drafts of the scripts for the DVD scenarios that were to be used at the basis of each of the modules. Experienced teachers of young LESLLA learners critically evaluated early drafts of the materials, and the final drafts of the materials were trialed in classes by AMEP teachers of the target group of learners, as well as being reviewed for content by experts in the content area that was addressed. The process of conceptualization, drafting, evaluating and revising, trialing and production took over two years, from the second half of 2005 to the beginning of 2008.

4.2 General approach

The following principles guided the production of the materials:

- A *Content-based approach* was adopted because it was deemed to be useful in engaging learners and providing them with learning of important content related to their settlement and progress in Australian society;
- The *Relationship with the CSWE curriculum framework* was to be that while the materials would contribute to specified curriculum and assessment objectives, they would not focus primarily on these. The rationale for this was that while some of the needs of this group are not comprehensively covered by the specified curriculum, the content of the materials should contribute to the mainstream curriculum. Teachers may, however, need to supplement the materials in order to fully meet all the program curriculum objectives.
- *Modules would be self-contained* so that teachers could insert them into a teaching program at the point at which they best fitted that program.
- *The materials would assist in the teaching of literacy*, as well as contributing to content learning and learning of ESL. There would be a focus on written language and connections made between spoken and written English.
- The materials would also include some attention to strategies for *learning how to learn*. This was considered in part because the target group of learners has limited prior experience of formal learning and because it is clear learners cannot learn all they need to in classrooms, and so need strategies to assist them in learning in many different contexts.
- The materials should portray *realistic youth situations* in order to assist the learners and help them to identify and engage with what is being taught.

These principles are illustrated in the materials described in section 4.4 below.

4.3 Content and focus

Each module contains four units of work around the topic of the module. The DVD introduces each unit with a social situation that introduces an aspect of the content and relevant language, providing the foundation of the learning activities and tasks in the student workbook. The CD Rom provides sound files for workbook tasks that involve spoken language. Some modules include supplementary materials, such as wall charts (in *Your Future* and *Your Health and Well Being* and a board game in *Your Money*). Teachers' notes for each unit provide suggestions for teachers about the use of the materials and an answer key for the workbook exercises.

The characters in the scenarios are young, of different ethnicities and, while each of the units and modules are self-contained, many of the characters appear across the different modules so there is some continuity of the people involved in the scenarios presented in the DVDs. The scenarios relate to aspects of life in Australia of relevance to the young learners who are the target audience of the materials.

The titles and content areas of the modules are:

- *Your future: Work and study*. This module looks at the idea of learning pathways and their connections with vocational goals, and the process of vocational goal setting.

- *Your time out.* This module deals with recreational activities (including water safety and beach safety – an essential survival skill in Australia).
- *Your money.* This module focuses on managing money, budgeting and strategies for managing money and how to economize.
- *Your communication.* This module looks at digital technology.
- *Your health and well-being.* This module covers healthy life styles, nutrition and eating.
- *You and me.* This module looks at interpersonal relations, cross cultural interaction and aspects of life in a multicultural society.

In each module the four self-contained units enable a focus on different aspects of the content and language.

The materials incorporate many of the essential elements of content-based language teaching, including the use of visuals as well as a focus on language as it is used in dealing with the topic under consideration (for example, Brinton, Snow Wesche 1989, Crandall & Kaufmann 2002). While there is no strong formal framework such as advocated by some advocates of content-based teaching (for example, Mohan 1986 or Chamot & O'Malley 1992) the *Get Wise* materials follow a loose framework in which specific elements of language, literacy, learning to learn and in some instances numeracy, are explored following a holistic encounter with language and content in a social situation that relates to the learners' social situation, needs and interests.

In each module the four self-contained units enable a focus on different aspects of the content and language.

4.4 The nature of the teaching materials and learning tasks

The workbook tasks in each module unit begin with a fairly common language teaching approach around the DVD scenario. The first part of the video is played, and/or pictures shown, and the students are asked to discuss the person, where they are, what they are doing and what will come next, thereby predicting what they might see when they then view the whole situation.

Figure 1 describes an example of a previewing task, in which the students are invited to discuss the situation and what is likely to occur.

A young African man is looking at a monthly calendar on a wall. He looks serious. His finger is pointing to Tuesday March 6, on which 'Pay Rent' is written in large print. 'Pay rent' is also written on Tuesday March 20. The caption above the photo reads, 'Paying the Rent'.

Activity 1 asks students to look at this photo and discuss who is in the photo, where he is, what he is looking at, what he has to pay, and finally 'What will happen next?'

Activity 2 invites the students to watch the video for the unit.

Figure 1: Summary of a Previewing discussion task: Paying the rent, *Get Wise: Your Money Student workbook*, Page 2.⁴

⁴ The entire Get Wise student workbook texts, along with other materials for all modules of the Get Wise teaching materials are available to view and download online at the AMEP (Adult Migrant English

The DVD situation for this video is described in Figure 2.

Luka and Kuol share a house together but are finding it hard to cover their costs. One morning Kuol notes the rent is due and leaves a note for Luka reminding him that he needs to pay his share of the rent. He goes out, and at the shops he meets Luka who has just bought two pairs of running shoes because they were a bargain at half their usual price. Kuol reminds him the rent is due, and Luka offers to give him his card and PIN to get the money out of the ATM. Kuol tells him he shouldn't give his PIN to anyone and suggests they walk to the ATM together. At the ATM Luka is surprised that he has only a little money in his account, but Kuol points out that because it is a debit account the payment for the shoes has already been deducted. Luka is surprised at this. They later meet a friend, SaySay Po, who is experiencing difficulties in his house as he doesn't get on with his brother-in-law. Luka and Kuol invite SaySay Po around to their house to see if he is interested in sharing with them. He will be sharing a (rather untidy) room with Luka but is happy to accept, and Luka promises to tidy up the room.

Figure 2: Overview of the video scenario presented in Unit 1, *Your Money* Following the situation there are follow up comprehension tasks, such as sequencing pictures of events, answering comprehension questions and so on.

Figure 3 presents the follow up tasks for the same DVD scenario on paying the rent. True false responses check students' understanding of different aspects of the scenario.

A black and white photo of a scene from the video shows Kuol and Luka walking past two ATMs located at a bank. Luka is carrying a shopping bag containing shoes. Activity 12 asks the students to circle 'True' or 'False' after each of seven sentences. An example is provided. 'Luka bought a jacket in the sales' is marked 'False'. Most of the sentences relate to the situation presented in the DVD, for example:

- 1. Luka and Kuol have to pay the rent tomorrow,*
- 2. SaySay Po has a problem*
- 4. Luka has a credit card.*

But one sentence (number 3) involves the students in relating what they have seen in the video story to themselves:

- 3. You should tell your friends your PIN'.*

Figure 3: Summary of comprehension task, *Get Wise: Your Money, Student workbook p 8.*

Students and teachers use the workbook to follow through the learning tasks for the unit, drawing on the CD Rom where a sound file is the basis for a learning task. Other learning materials such as a wall chart or a game are provided with some modules as supplementary materials.

The tasks that follow provide a range of tasks focusing on language, literacy skills, numeracy extensions of content, and learning how to learn. To conclude each unit there is a word search⁵ and a learner reflection on what they have learned from their work in the unit.

4.5 Focus on language.

These learning tasks focus on an aspect of language relevant to the topic. The focus may be a lexical item, a grammatical structure or a language function. Figure 4 describes a learning task that provides a focus on the use of conditionals in relation to misdemeanors and fines in public places, from *Your Money*: Unit 3.

Activity 117 invites students to write about fines. The model provided shows a completed sentence written after a prompt. The prompt is (dropping rubbish), and the completed sentence provided is
'If you drop rubbish you can get a fine of \$160'.
The other prompts are (putting your feet on a seat), (making a journey without a valid ticket), and (drinking alcohol). The shell sentence the students are to complete reads
'If you _____ you can get a fine of _____.'
A previous task provided information about the amount payable in fines for certain violations of public transport regulations.

Figure 4: Description of a language focused learning task: *Get Wise: Your Money*, *Student workbook*, p 70.

4.6 Literacy skills.

While there is general literacy work involving students in reading and writing of texts (in some cases copying) many of the literacy focused learning tasks assist learners in seeing the connections between spoken and written language, as is described in Figure 5.

Activity 119 asks students to write words from a list according to whether the letter 'c' in each of the words signals a /k/ sound, or an /s/ sound.
An example is provided with 'cooked' heading the column for the /k/ sound and 'cigarette' heading the column for /s/.
The remaining words in the list are 'cycling', 'cup', 'cereal', 'can', 'rice', and 'colour'.

Activity 120 is a listening task. Students are asked to listen to the words in a list and place them under the correct heading. The headings use different sized circles to indicate different patterns of syllable stress within polysyllabic words.

The headings are:

o O

O o o

O o o o

O o

o O o

o O o o

⁵ A puzzle with letters on a grid and students are to identify given words that occurred in the chapter by circling or highlighting them.

'Relax' has been given as an example. It is under the o O heading. The other words in the list are 'regularly', 'improve', 'began', 'recipe', 'supermarket', 'exercise', 'healthier', 'yogurt', 'tomato', 'aerobics', 'ingredients', 'breakfast', 'preservative', 'lentils', 'appointment'.

Figure 5: Description of learning tasks the involve students in exploring phonemic-orthographic relationships, *Get Wise: Your Health and Well Being, Student workbook*, p 68.

4.7 Numeracy skills

In most of the modules there are learning tasks that focus on numeracy skills or at least provide practice in skills (which may require further attention by the class teacher). Figure 6 shows how the notion of 'rounding' is dealt with in *Your Money: Unit 2*.

A learning tip is provided under the heading 'Food Shopping'. The tip is that you can use rounded numbers to add up quickly if you don't have a calculator on hand. In this way you can estimate a total amount, and check that your calculator is working properly.

Then activity 73 asks students to look at some price labels and estimate the answers. The first 3 items include two price tags and the last three items include three price tags. For each item, a column to the right of the price tags provides a prompt of 'About ____', on the top line and then on the next line 'Total is about ____' and a final column is headed 'Total (using calculator)'. The completed example has price tags of \$3.95 + \$4.79, in the next column, 'About \$4 + \$5, Total is about \$9' inserted, and the final column '\$8.78'. The price tags have amounts in which the dollar amounts are mostly under ten, (though two items are above ten dollars) and the cents amounts are either between 1 cent and 18 cents or between 79 and 99 cents.

Figure 6: Description of a numeracy focused learning task, *Get Wise: Your Money, Student workbook* p 43.

4.8 Extension of content

Some learning tasks provide extension of an aspect of the content of the unit. For example Figure 7 illustrates a task from *Your Money* Unit 1, in which the difference between debit and credit and some other aspects of a bank account are explored. Note how the learners are encouraged to draw on their existing knowledge and collaborate in exploring their understanding.

Activity 31 presents a facsimile of the top part of a bank statement, showing column headings, dates and details of some transactions. In boxes below the facsimile students are asked to match some words with meanings, listed in another set of boxes. As an example 'credit' is matched to 'money going into the account'. The other words to be matched to a meaning are 'debit', 'balance', 'transaction' and 'fee'. Activity 32 asks students what other banking words they know, to write them down and to discuss their meanings with other students.

Activity 33 asks the students to answer two questions and talk with their classmates and teacher about them. The questions ask how often the students get bank statements and whether they check their bank statements.

Figure 7: Description of a learning task that extends the unit content, *Get Wise: Your Money*, Student workbook p 18.

4.9 Learning to learn and reflection on learning

Learning to learn skills are dealt with through ‘Learning tips’ that are interspersed in the workbook tasks at points where they can be related to particular tasks. These can be elaborated and demonstrated by the class teacher and explored in class. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning, and they are asked to self rate their understanding of key aspects of the content of the unit.

Each unit is rounded off with a word search based on key vocabulary of the unit, which is followed by the learners’ reflections on their learning.

5 Conclusion: Response to the Get Wise materials and implications

The materials have been distributed to AMEP providers free of charge and made available publicly on the internet through the EDNA (Education Network Australia) website (<http://www.groups.edna.edu.au/course/view.php?id=2051>) . While a systematic post-distribution evaluation was beyond the project scope, there have been anecdotal accounts of widespread utilization of the materials in the AMEP and some non AMEP programs, with teachers reporting that the materials have a strong impact on the learners. There have been reports of teachers of students at higher levels of language adapting the materials and writing worksheets with tasks that reflect the higher language and literacy levels of their students. The *Your Money* module won an award for Excellence in Educational Publishing in the TAFE and Further Education Teaching and Learning Category in the 2008 Australian Publishing Association awards.

The *Get Wise* project materials illustrate the potential that a content-based approach can make to meeting the complex learning needs of young LESLLA learners. The engagement with content presented in a socially relevant way for young LESLLA learners enables a foundation for the further exploration of aspects of language, literacy, numeracy and learning to learn. Learning tasks based on a foundation of content enable focused exploration of these dimensions and provides the integration of tasks in which the learners apply their learning across these dimensions. While the *Get wise* published materials represent the outcome of a well-resourced national project, they also illustrate principles teachers can apply in developing more locally focused and less ambitious, but nonetheless valuable, teaching and learning materials.

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