

OUR ENVIRONMENT - BRINGING SUSTAINABILITY TO THE ESL COMMUNITY

Sarah Poole, Jessica Jones, Michelle Morgan

Lalor Living and Learning Centre (LLLC), VIC

To the north of Melbourne, at Lalor Living and Learning Centre (LLLC), we tried to communicate ‘sustainable living’ practices to our students and to members of the community, the majority of whom came from other countries. However, we found that this was not enough, and that our random teachings were not effective in changing the behaviour of our students.

So our idea was born - to develop specific ‘sustainability teaching materials’ for use in the classroom for ESL and Low Literacy participants and also extend the understanding around climate change to the wider community, by working with local stakeholders e.g. City of Whittlesea Sustainability Unit, Yarra Plenty Regional Library and NMIT Epping.

A Grant was successfully sought from Sustainability Victoria to resource the development of these Teaching Materials. This Project aimed to make physical transformations to the LLLC building, so that students could see environmental changes happening around them, whilst they learnt about the principles underpinning these changes, in the classroom.

Our Environment – ESL Teaching Materials

Sarah Poole, Jessica Jones and Michelle Morgan came together at LLLC to develop the Teaching Materials titled: Our Environment. Together they represent three generations, and therefore three perspectives, on what ‘living more sustainably’ means to the average person. Working closely with the enthusiastic ESL teachers the authors gradually turned the research and ideas being developed into ESL Teaching Materials.

We quickly realised that this task, to take a complex and scientific subject with many facets to it and break it down so that it is understandable to people who are new to the English language, was going to be a bigger challenge than originally thought! We also realised that the Teaching Materials needed to be relevant to the student’s everyday lives in Australia, so that students became interested in the topic, were hungry to learn more and may possibly become interested in this industry as a future career path.

We began by developing teaching materials to cover the overall theme of ‘living more sustainably’ by exploring and understanding the topic of Climate Change. We felt we needed to provide a basic understanding regarding what is happening to the planet and how that is relevant to the lives of the students.

Because we were working with ESL Teachers who had minimal knowledge in the ‘sustainability’ field, we needed to give teachers enough time to explore and understand the material before they trialled it in the classroom. Early feedback from Carmela Garzia, our principle advising ESL teacher, indicated that the students found the topic of Climate Change engaging, however the vocabulary and concepts were challenging and therefore took two – three weeks to teach. She also discovered that many students had no prior knowledge about this topic in their own countries but, due to their circumstances, were already adept at living successfully with the smallest of resources.

When working closely with City of Whittlesea Sustainability Officers, it emerged that there was a significant need to focus the teaching materials on a range of practical topics, taught to ESL students by these Officers on previous occasions. In response to this feedback we began to develop teaching materials on the themes of Energy at Home, Minimising and Sorting Waste, Being Wise with Water and Going Out Shopping.

An event was run at LLLC in May 2011 to mark the commencement of this Project. The general community were invited to attend mini workshops and celebrate some of the visual additions to the centre: a compost bin; the sustainability notice board; recycle bins in each of the classrooms; posters and photographs visually describing environmental messages; the closure of gaps around doors and windows provided by the City of Whittlesea; black balloons conveying energy usage and yellow balloons conveying energy savings. This event attracted significant media attention – spreading our messages of ‘living more sustainably’ out to the surrounding community.

The development and piloting of the teaching materials took place after this event through to February 2012. ESL, Literacy and AMEP Teachers at NMIT Epping, and RMIT Brunswick were also enlisted to help pilot the materials and to capture a broader response. These teachers invested many hours ironing out problems and contributing valuable suggestions.

The design of Our Environment was influenced by feedback from teachers and also by the fact that it needed to be downloaded and printed from the SV and LLLC websites. Each Activity in the Unit needed to be easily printed in black and white, with a related Activity on both sides of a single page for easy photocopying. The Units are loose leaf and not bound together. Each Activity can be taught independently of other Activities in the Unit. Different learning styles are supported by

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offering information and activities in a range of ways including: diagrams, photographs, internet activities, short on line videos and word games. The graphics and layout of the Units had to reflect a contemporary style.

Support Materials

Image Support Documents

All the images needed to be Australian examples, visually stimulating, in full colour (to inspire the students) and easily displayed to the students. In consequence, we developed an Image Support Document where all the images are enlarged to fit an A4 page and can be displayed on a computer screen or on a data projector. This will hopefully eliminate the need to print these images in large sizes.

Teacher's Notes

Each Unit is based on the CSWE curriculum framework (Certificate of Spoken and Written English). Unit 1: Understanding Climate Change, was developed for levels 1-IV as an introductory Unit, whereas Units 2 – 6 were developed for CSWE II – III. Each of these booklets have corresponding Teacher's Notes. They are designed to support teachers to learn more about the topic, equip them with stimulating and up to date computer resources and help them adapt the Teaching Materials for the specific level and curriculum framework, they are using. Of course they include all the answers too!

Flash Cards

These cards were developed as an introduction to each of the Units, in response to feedback from teachers during the final piloting phase. Several teachers suggested that a fun activity at the beginning of each Unit would help students to tackle and understand the new words and new concepts presented in each Unit.

The Six Teaching Units presented below include:

Unit 1	Understanding Climate Change – for levels CSWE I - IV
Unit 2	Energy Efficiency at Home - for levels CSWE II - III
Unit 3	Managing Household Waste - for levels CSWE II - III
Unit 4	Being Wise with Water - for levels CSWE II - III
Unit 5	Smarter Shopping - for levels CSWE II - III
Unit 6	Sustainable Transport - for levels CSWE II - III

Unit 1 Understanding Climate Change

This Unit was developed as an introduction to the other 5 Units, exposing students to the theme of 'living more sustainably' and being aware of how human activity can be harmful to our environment and how this activity is thought to be contributing to climate change. This Unit doesn't try to convince students that climate change exists or that it doesn't exist. It aims to familiarise students with common vocabulary and equip them with some of the themes currently being debated, in order for students to form their own opinions, have a better chance to follow this debate within the media and understand the underlying theme that humans could be doing a better job of managing this planet. Understanding Climate Change briefly presents Australia's First Australians, and how they did not seek 'ownership' over the natural environment, but existed with and within it. In the Advanced level, students are asked to visit the on line SBS documentary titled the First Australians and follow a discussion provided by Professor Janet McCalman by reading along with the transcript provided and then discussing the meaning.

Unit 2 Energy Efficiency at Home

This Unit encourages students to use the internet but can also be completed without a computer. Students are shown how electricity and gas is measured, the abbreviations utilised, how to measure the power usage of different appliances and what being 'energy efficient' means. Understanding Your Electricity and Gas Bill have been popular activities, and students are encouraged to bring their own Bills to class, to compare the measurements, charges and other details. Students are encouraged to visit the 'Your Choice' website where students can learn how to compare their energy prices with other energy providers. This information can also help equip students if an energy provider knocks on their front door at home. Students learn about renewable energy and how to utilise that if they wish to. Energy Rating Labels, black balloons and suggestions on how to be more energy efficient at home, are also explored and discussed.

Unit 3 Managing Household Waste

There was an urgent need to teach students how to sort their waste into the four bins commonly used by Councils: the recycle, compost, green waste and the rubbish/garbage bin. As a result of this need, we collected a week of waste and put it all together to see what a week of waste looks like! Students are asked to 'get to know' these waste items, by sorting them, labelling them, discussing the materials they are made of, numbering them, etc. There are 50 items in total – quite a large number of items for students to manage. Gradually each of the four bins is introduced and the waste items are sorted into them, leaving only 6 items which need to go into the Rubbish Bin and on to landfill! To help students manage these 50 items, the Waste Game was created, where each of the 50 items have their own card with an image on the front and their label on the back. Teachers can use this game as a simple way of sorting the waste, or by playing snap or a memory game. Other Activities in the Unit cover: reducing, reusing, recycling and buying recycled items; thought provoking statistics about reducing the need to reap raw materials; the plight of the Flesh Footed Shearwaters on Lord Howe Island which are ingesting pieces of plastic by mistaking them for food and detailed information about how to set up your own compost at your learning centre or at home.

Unit 4 Being Wise with Water

This Unit aims to convey to students the preciousness of water, particularly in Australia. It discusses how water exists in the natural environment and how differently it exists in the urban environment i.e. storm water and waste water cycles and water restrictions. This Unit was developed to encourage students to appreciate and learn to love water. By doing this it is hoped that students will want to save water, not just because society asks them to, but because they understand how the environment will benefit from better water management and conservation. An example Water Bill is also discussed, where students are encouraged to bring their own water bill to class, to help to understand and locate key information. Feedback from the teachers stated that students enjoyed learning the vocabulary as it equipped students with more knowledge to better understand current water topics in the news and in the media.

Unit 5 Smarter Shopping

This Unit suggests a variety of ways to reduce the amount of packaging we take home with the products we have purchased. It suggests ways of reducing this packaging by buying in bulk, using reusable bags or containers and understanding why we use concentrates, refillables and washables. This Unit presents the premise that it is environmentally beneficial to shop locally and in season rather than travelling a long distance to purchase goods, or to purchase products which have travelled a long distance to get to you. It discusses Farmer's Markets, Food Co-ops and growing food in your own garden or utilising a community garden. Smarter Shopping discusses the advantages and disadvantages of 'organic foods' and the principles supporting permaculture. We have presented ways to assist students when purchasing energy efficient appliances and Redgum Communications have provided several humorous on line videos which employ clever techniques to raise the awareness of students when shopping for appliances.

Unit 6 Sustainable Transport

This Unit encourages students to explore alternative ways of travelling than by driving a car. Walking is discussed as a healthy alternative to driving and its environmental benefits are outlined. The advantages and disadvantages of cycling are presented including the use of electric bikes, road safety and air pollution. How to get from place to place on public transport, using the internet to plan a journey, public transport zones and the benefits of using public transport are also discussed. Students are encouraged to discuss the carbon dioxide emitted when driving and how to calculate and reduce that. The concepts of car pooling, car sharing and growing trees to offset emissions are discussed together with a range of websites for students to explore. A humorous on line video can be utilised to help students become familiar with some of the decisions which need to be made when buying a car.

We hope that you will find Our Environment a valuable teaching resource and use it frequently. Feedback is always welcome. After its launch, it will be free to download from the Lalor Living and Learning Centre and the Sustainability Victoria, websites. The launch should be held before the end of 2012, after a sponsor has been sourced to help publish, distribute and promote these Teaching Materials across Victoria.

Sarah Poole

Project Manager

Lalor Living and Learning Centre

Email: sarahpl@netspace.net.au,

Mobile: 0407 813 776.

Pre-launch CD's of Our Environment can be purchased from Sarah for \$6.00.

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The three authors of Our Environment are:

Sarah Poole, Jessica Jones and Michelle Morgan.

The author of this article, Sarah Poole, is a secondary teacher, artist and arts manager with experience working on environmental issues and projects.

Jessica Jones completed a Bachelor of Environments at The University of Melbourne and has shown great creativity and skill with the graphic design and the electronically savvy elements of the development of the Teaching Materials.

Michelle Morgan has a health sciences (public health) degree, works in research and completed the Permaculture Design Certificate a few years ago. Michelle is also a singer and musician and one of her songs, 'the Permie - Song' features as a listening and comprehension activity in Unit 5: Smarter Shopping.