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# ***MOVING IN NEW DIRECTIONS***

## ***Strategies for meeting the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling***

There are two programs on the video:

- Literacy strategies for ESL learners with disrupted schooling.
- Roundtable discussion: Meeting the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling.

### **Suggested professional development activities**

These activities can be adopted for use with either individual schools, or by a facilitator with a group of teachers across a number of schools. Background notes are also provided.

Each program can be viewed separately and is not dependent on the other.

Both programs are designed to assist ESL teachers, mainstream teachers and administrators to meet the needs of ESL students with disrupted schooling effectively. They inform teachers about the backgrounds of these learners and how they may affect their social and academic behaviour.

They inform administrators about a whole school approach to meet the needs of these learners.

The first program, *Literacy strategies for ESL learners with disrupted schooling*, comprises two case studies and classroom strategies modelled in the classroom. The second, *Meeting the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling*, is a roundtable discussion between four experienced practitioners. It addresses the issues of pathways, the effects of trauma and a whole school approach to meeting these learners' needs.

### **The learners**

These learners have had dislocation in their countries of origin. Many have lived in war zones and subsequently in refugee camps. They may have had brutal experiences and seen people, including relatives, tortured or killed.

Family members may have been dispersed over a country and lost contact with each other because of political conflict in their country.

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# Program 1 – Literacy strategies for ESL learners with disrupted schooling

## Activity 1

Eight questions

### *Procedure*

The purpose for this activity is for participants to examine the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling.

- Ask participants to complete the eight questions on Handout 1 in pairs or groups before watching the video. Have them guess at any answer they don't know. Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this activity.
- Participants watch the program which runs for thirty minutes.
- After viewing the program, ask participants to discuss in small groups their answers in light of what they have learned. Would they change them? Are there concrete initiatives they could introduce in their school?
- Have groups report back, then hold a general discussion on the differences in participants' views before and after watching the video. There are suggestions in the background notes on points you may elicit from the participants. Groups can also report back on what they feel schools can do to support students. It would be worthwhile recording these suggestions so participants can implement them in their schools.

### *Background notes*

- What may these learners' educational needs be?

If the students have lived in war zones they may not have been to school at all or they may have been in refugee camps with a form of education unlike that in Australia.

They may not know how to hold a pen or use a ruler. They may not be literate in their own language and thus be unfamiliar with the uses and conventions of writing.

Teachers need to be aware of students' particular backgrounds so they can base their teaching on the learners' experiences and use their oral language as the basis for their written work.

- What has their past experience taught them?

Their past experiences may have been extremely changeable and they may have been exposed to violence. They may have lived in another country after leaving their country of birth and before their arrival in Australia, and travelled considerable distances by foot to seek refuge. This may have taught them to be wary and to respond to conflict in ways that are inappropriate in Australia.

- What skills do they bring to the learning process?

Their oral language skills and listening skills may be highly developed and memory skills well honed. Care should be taken not to assume that the absence of a formal education means these students know little.

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- What might the teacher need to introduce them to?

In the classroom the teacher may need to introduce routines to make these students feel secure and explain what is expected in Australian schools. All assumptions about what students have been exposed to should be carefully checked.

Classroom organisation needs to be clear so routines can be easily followed. The written word needs to be visible in the classroom to facilitate their reading and spelling.

Teachers may need to introduce the students to the play equipment in a primary school. Social expectations may need to be explained.

- What practices are effective for teaching literacy skills in the primary school?

Language teaching needs to be based on the students' experiences and the contexts they are faced with, oral language needs to be introduced before written language and written language needs to be visible around the classroom. Clarify the relationship between oral sounds and the written form. Use of listening posts and the computer can be used to foster engagement and facilitate learning.

- What practices are effective for teaching literacy skills in the secondary school?

A language education approach based on learning language in context can assist the skill acquisition of these learners. Clarify the relationship between sounds and their written form, using word sound lists on the board and/or sound word books. English is not always phonetic so imprinting the visual image of words can aid learning. Use of the computer and listening posts fosters engagement and facilitates learning. Silent reading, underlining unfamiliar words, followed by the teacher reading aloud and the student answering focusing questions provides learners with guiding cues to comprehension. Skimming and scanning skills are useful to enable students to find signposts on the page. Less material is better to cater for these students. They can then focus on language components without confusion.

- What whole school initiatives could be used to assist these students and their families?

Multicultural Education Aides can be used to communicate with parents and to help the students in the classroom.

Community support can be organised to support ESL learners with disrupted schooling outside the classroom. An example of this may be homework clubs.

Schools can consider forming literacy teams to target the needs of these learners.

Schools can watch for signs of trauma and arrange counselling support for learners when necessary. They can use outside agencies.

What initiatives could be introduced at your school?

Teachers need to learn about the students' backgrounds and their social and academic needs.

They need to ascertain their resources in order to meet these needs.

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## Activity 2

Whole school approach to meet the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling:  
Strategies one to ten

### *Procedure*

This activity is designed to be completed after viewing the video to focus participants' attention on practical steps they may take when working with ESL learners with disrupted schooling.

The photocopiable work sheet provided Handout 2 asks participants to discuss how each strategy might be implemented in their school context and then to rank the strategies in order of importance.

You might ask each group to record and collate their suggestions about how strategies could be implemented and then report back to the whole group. Alternatively, their lists of suggestions could be photocopied and distributed after the session or used as a basis for further discussion in relevant forums. It would be useful to have participants group the suggestions under a number of headings, such as:

- Use of staff
- Administrative procedures
- Teachers and teaching practice
- School programs

You could also ask groups to report back on their top three strategies and their reason for choosing those for their school.

It would be worthwhile asking participants to reflect on or share one step they could take or one strategy they could implement in their work with these students.

### *Background notes*

The need for a whole school approach:

- Develop procedures for information collection and distribution to teachers.
- Arrange for key information to be provided to parents in their first language or access the multilingual notices: [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl)
- Examine the role of staff, for example the student welfare coordinator, administration and literacy coordinators. There may be a need for a case management approach. Multicultural Education Aides can facilitate communication with parents.
- Plan professional development activities to raise teachers' awareness of these learners' needs. Cultural background information sessions and the effects of trauma on student learning are conducted by the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture and ESL Project Officers at the Languages and Multicultural Education Resources Centre. (See Resources, p.13).
- Homework support could be established to meet their needs and provide general support.

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Social and educational needs:

- Activities that explain rules, regulations, laws and the role of authorities in Australia will help these students feel more secure.
- Learners may be suffering from “numbing” caused by trauma caused by experiences in the past. They need time to adjust without too many demands on them.
- Routines and organisational demands need to be established and adhered to.
- Social expectations in the schoolground and the classroom need to be clarified.
- Learners may need to be taught how to use classroom equipment like rulers and pens.
- Assumptions about their knowledge of curriculum content should not be made.
- Progress may appear to be slow because they may not have attended a school comparable to an Australian one before arriving in Australia. This needs to be accepted so the learners are not placed under pressure.
- English needs to be taught orally before the written form is used and it should be based as much as possible on their experience.

Communication with parents:

- Parents need to understand what information the school may need and why.
- Regular meetings with parents to explain the Victorian educational system and issues related to school and the wider community would be useful.

## Activity 3

Student writing

### *Procedure*

The purpose of this activity is to raise participants' awareness of the literacy needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling and to examine the most effective strategies to meet these needs.

- This activity would be best done after viewing the video, however, you first need to do some preparation by building up a collection of extracts from student writing. Annotated samples are included.
- Divide participants into small groups of primary and secondary teachers and present them with a selection of writing samples and **Handout 3**. Discuss what they can learn about the student from the writing and analyse what the literacy needs are.
- The participants could compile a number of strategies appropriate for effectively teaching these students. Groups can report back, followed by a whole-group discussion of suitable strategies to meet specific needs.

### *Background notes*

Writing:

- Learners may need assistance with handwriting and how to use classroom equipment like pens and rulers.

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- Classroom routines need to be clear.
  - Analyse their language needs. Their use of grammatical forms and vocabulary needs to be analysed.
  - Base their writing on their oral language and their experiences.
  - Expect gradual acquisition of skills.
  - Skimming and scanning allow them to see signposts on the page. Ask learners to find numbers and dates, numbered points, specific data to allow them to understand the structure of the writing on the page.
  - The learners will need assistance with organisation of their writing. A3 sheets with blocks for paragraphs explaining introduction, ideas, events and conclusion are useful.
  - Modelling and concept maps may assist their writing.
  - Secondary students may be assisted by for and against lists and data charts to organise their ideas.

## Activity 4

### General discussion

#### *Procedure*

The purpose of this activity is to provide an opportunity for general discussion. It is meant only as a guide. In order to be useful, it is important that the discussion is pertinent to participants' school situations. The discussion would work best with small groups of participants divided into primary and secondary teachers.

- You will need to collect answers to the following questions before the session to ensure the discussion will be relevant to the participants' schools:
  1. How many ESL learners are there with disrupted schooling?
  2. Where do they come from?
  3. What language/s do they speak?
  4. Given this information, what experiences might these students have had?
- After viewing the video, ask participants general questions about what they gained from the video, as well as questions that pertain to their particular school settings.

Examples of general questions are:

- What was one of the key points made in the video?
- What was one thing you learnt?
- Did the video extend your knowledge?
- Were you surprised by anything in the video?
- What challenges were indicated for learners, schools and teachers?
- What possible action/s could you introduce at your school that were suggested in the video?

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## Program 2 – Roundtable discussion: Meeting the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling

### *Procedure*

This activity may be useful before, during and after the program. A number of issues are examined and participants can assess opinions and form their own.

- Before viewing the video, ask participants to write notes of their knowledge or opinions. Arrange participants in small groups of primary and secondary teachers to discuss **Handout 4**.
- Participants can then watch the video.
- After viewing the video, have small groups of participants discuss the information gained. Participants from each group then report back to the main group. This discussion can form the basis for school initiatives. The background notes contain some ideas and suggestions that can be elicited during the group discussion.

### *Background notes*

The effects of past experiences:

- The trauma of past experiences, such as witnessing torture or the killing of relatives, can affect sleeping patterns which makes it difficult to concentrate in class. It may be difficult for them to remain sitting for a whole lesson.
- Trauma may cause students to experience “numbing” which means they cannot concentrate and they may appear to be mentally absent. At this point copying is a useful exercise.
- Withdrawal is one response to conflict, anger might be another. Students may need counselling about how to respond to conflict. They may have used violence effectively in the past and it may have been seen as appropriate in those circumstances. They need advice about acceptable behaviour to resolve conflict in Australia.
- These learners may have completed some years of primary school or may not have attended a school at all. This has a number of effects. They do not know what expectations schools and teachers have of them. In primary school they need guidance to ensure they carry homework books and readers between home and school. Setting weekly goals is a useful practice. At the secondary level they find timetables difficult to read and organisation of folders and homework present a challenge for them. They need close monitoring and support. Rules and routines need to be clearly explained. All expectations, social and academic, need to be explicitly explained to the students and their parents. Students may challenge the system if they feel their families do not understand the system.
- Learners may have many skills and much knowledge to learn and it will take time. They will improve and need to know they are making progress and will be supported in this long process. They should not feel they are failures, they should be set realistic goals and have realistic expectations. Teachers should not feel anxious, but do what they can in the time given.

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- Teachers can assist learners by modifying work set or using different modes of study or outcome requirements. Recycling teaching points and modelling activities will aid student learning.

A whole school approach:

- Regular parent contact is extremely beneficial. Meetings, afternoon teas and home visits can inform parents about expectations of their children, social and academic, as well as informing them about our learning style and the education system. Multicultural Education Aides play a vital role in communication with parents which may need to be oral because the parents may not be literate in their own language.
- Schools may establish an orientation program for each of these students. There may be a buddy system together with a teacher or Multicultural Education Aide to monitor their progress weekly. The students may need to be profiled and guided on a case management basis.
- Professional development for teachers is useful. It may focus on cultural backgrounds or the effects of trauma. (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and ESL Project Officers at the Languages and Multicultural Education Resource Centre, see Resources p. 13).
- In secondary schools teams of teachers can facilitate student learning. Teachers from different subject areas can support each other by discussing strategies, students' emotional needs and family situations.
- Homework clubs provide support for students whose parents are unable to help them because they do not speak English and may not be literate in their own language.
- It may be more effective to form ESL Literacy classes in secondary schools; combining Years 7 and 8 or Years 9 and 10 may be necessary.
- Secondary schools may be able to provide students with optional pathways. For example, there are bridging programs in some TAFE colleges.
- Primary schools could use the *Rainbow program* to help students to cope with trauma. Secondary schools can use *Kaleidoscope* for the same purpose. (Contact Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture, see Resources p. 13).

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## Handout 1

### Eight questions

1. What may these learners' educational needs be?

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2. What has their past experience taught them?

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3. What skills do they bring to the learning process?

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4. What might the teacher need to introduce the students to?

- i. in the classroom
- ii. in the schoolground
- iii. in relation to school routines and organisation
- iv. in relation to social expectations

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5. What practices are effective for teaching literacy skills in the primary school? What strategies could be introduced at your school?

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6. What practices are effective for teaching literacy skills in the secondary school? What strategies could be introduced at your school?

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7. What whole school initiatives could be used to assist these students and their families?

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8. What initiatives could be introduced at your school?

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## Handout 2

### Strategies

The following strategies for helping with the social resettlement of ESL learners with disrupted schooling are suggested in the video. Discuss ways of implementing them *in your school context* and then rank them as of high, medium or low importance and relevance *for your context*.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Collecting information about an individual student's background
- \_\_\_\_\_ Establishing relationships with the parents and families
- \_\_\_\_\_ Knowing about students' recent history and cultural background
- \_\_\_\_\_ Organising out of school hours programs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Providing a safe and happy classroom
- \_\_\_\_\_ Providing an inclusive curriculum
- \_\_\_\_\_ Providing ESL literacy programs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Providing positive adult role models
- \_\_\_\_\_ Recognising cultural and religious practices
- \_\_\_\_\_ Facilitating the expression of stories

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## Handout 3

### Writing strategies

1. Is handwriting an area of need? Give examples.

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2. Are there specific items of grammar which need improvement? Give examples.

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3. Are there areas of vocabulary which need to be addressed? Give examples.

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4. How can these needs be addressed?

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5. How can you help students organise their writing?

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6. How can these learners be helped to develop and express their knowledge and ideas? Give examples.

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7. How can classroom organisation assist these students?

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8. What activities would facilitate their learning?

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## Annotated writing

Stage: BL - Middle/Upper Primary

Strand: Writing

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

On Tuesday I looked at TV. After that I helped my little sister.

\* On Tuesday I looked at TV. After that I helped my little sister.

\* After that I looked at a book.

\* Asterisk indicates where the teacher has scribed for the student.

**Task:** Diary writing, using his or her own drawings.

**Context:** This text was written by a ten-year-old student who had been in Australia and attending an English language centre for only one term. She is preliterate in her first language and the language centre was her first experience in an education setting. Once a week the class had a lesson in which they drew and wrote in their 'diary'. Before recording her ideas, the student talked with the teacher about her after-school activities from the previous day. She then drew pictures of each activity and wrote a sentence about each picture. She asked the teacher how to write 'TV' and 'sister', copied 'Tuesday' from the wall chart, and found 'after that' in her personal dictionary. The teacher then wrote the sentence out again for the student to copy.

### What the text shows

This text provides an opportunity to record student progress towards the achievement of the following outcomes:

#### **BL.1 Communicate familiar ideas, messages, events and experiences through drawings, copied writing or own writing.**

The student has drawn pictures to relate what she had done after school. The text shows that she can write some words **A** and copy others **B**. The student also wrote her own name.

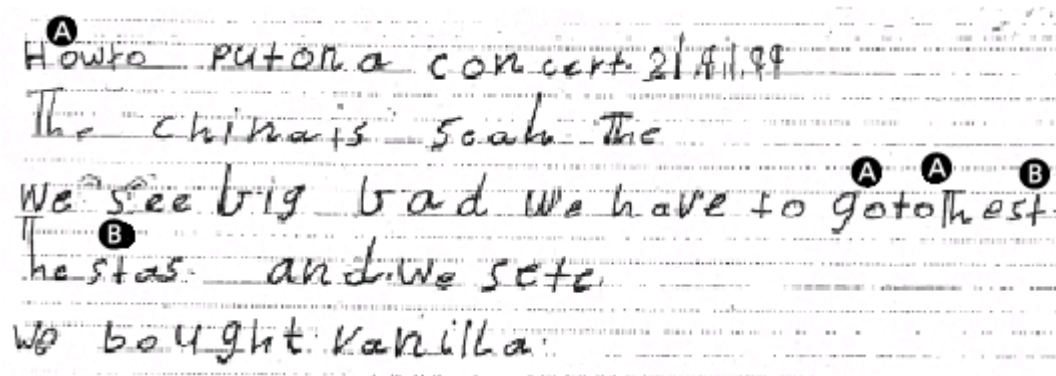
#### **BL.2 Demonstrate early awareness that written texts in English are presented**

##### **according to certain conventions which change according to context and purpose.**

The student has left spaces between letters and words and drawn and written in the appropriate places. She has copied words from the wall and her dictionary correctly **C** and used the dotted lines to help size her writing.

BL.3 Write simple texts using copied or formulaic English, or models based on spoken repertoire, and showing some basic writing conventions.

Letters and words have been copied correctly **B** and the writing reflects her oral structure, such as 'looked at TV' **D**. This sample also indicates that she consistently writes letters the same way. BL.4 Model own writing on shared writing activities or published texts, and use some basic strategies to convey information in writing. The illustrations helped to provide more detail, such as the third picture portraying her sister as being 'little'. Words were copied from charts and her personal dictionary and she dictated the word 'little' for the teacher to write **E**. The student checked that she had copied 'Tuesday' correctly and also asked the teacher how to write 'TV'. This text is indicative of the level of context, support and modelling that BL students require in order to practise and acquire basic written conventions.



**Text as read by student to teacher:**

The China is singing [student's own attempt]. Then we see a big man. We have to go to the station. The station and we sit [copied from another student] We bought vanilla (ice-cream). [copied from 'Melbourne Central' book, a classroom produced text]

**Task:** Write what you need to do if you are organising a concert.

**Context:** The text was written by an eleven-year-old in a language centre who has been in Australia for two months. The student was preliteracy in the first language. Procedural texts had been a class focus. After an excursion to a concert, the students were asked to write about how they would organise a concert. The student wrote a recount of the excursion, using the resources around her.

**What the text shows**

This text provides an opportunity to record student progress towards the achievement of the following outcomes:

**BL.1 Communicate familiar ideas, messages, events and experiences through drawings, copied writing or own writing.**

This text demonstrates an ability to write and copy well-known words.

**BL.2 Demonstrate early awareness that written texts in English are presented according to certain conventions which change according to context and purpose.**

The writer keeps to word boundaries with a couple of exceptions **A**. The writing is appropriately sized and well-known words such as the, we and to are consistently spelt.

**BL.3 Write simple texts using copies or formulaic English, or models based on spoken repertoire, and showing some basic writing conventions.**

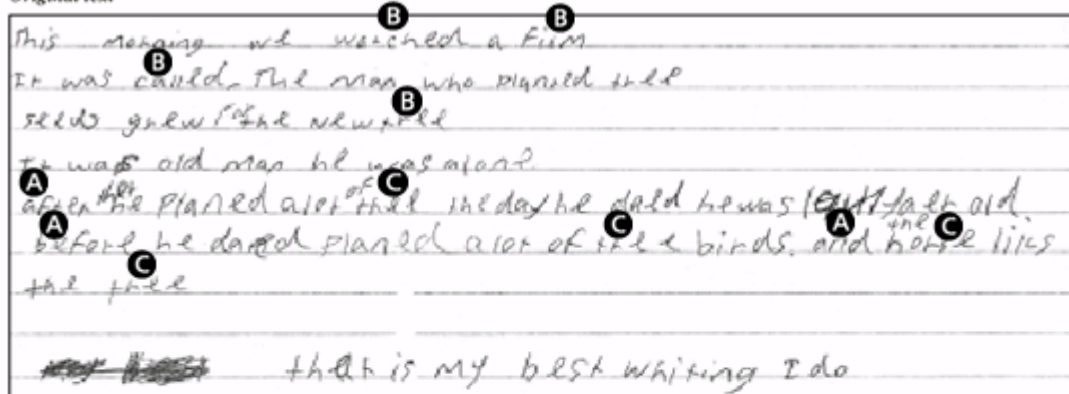
The text demonstrates an ability to copy accurately and to consistently write the same letters the same way. The attempted spelling of station **B**, demonstrates an awareness that certain letters represent certain sounds.

**BL.4 Model own writing on shared writing activities or published texts, and use some basic strategies to convey information in writing.**

In writing this text, the student has used words copied from various sources

This text displays an awareness and use of basic writing conventions and an ability to copy accurately. These are core skills for Writing at Stage BL

Original text



Transcribed text

\*This morning we watched a film It was called The Man who planted tree  
seeds grew For the new tree It was old man he was alone after that he planeda lot of  
tree the day he daed he was 1947 yaer old. before he daed planed a lot of tree birds and  
the horse like the tree

[\*Note: The first two sentences were copied off the board. Correct spellings of other underlined words were on the board while the text was being written.]

**Task:** Recount of a film.

**Context:** The text is a first draft written by a fifteen-year-old Year 9 girl who had been in Australia for just over a year. She had not been to school in her first country but had studied English in an intensive English program in Australia for ten months. The class had watched an accessible film as a stimulus. There was a brief discussion and key words were put on the board as students recounted what they had seen. Students copied the first two sentences and continued to write about the film.

**What the text shows**

This text relates to mid-stage SL. It provides an opportunity to record student progress toward the achievement of the following outcomes:

**SL.1 Communicate simple messages, ideas and experiences through drawing, copied writing and own writing.**

The writer demonstrates an ability to write and copy some well known words and to approximate conventional letter formation.

**SL.2 Show an awareness of some of the conventions used for organising written text and the purposes and audiences for which texts are written.**

The writing is appropriately sized within the lines.

**SL.3 Write simple texts based on familiar linguistic structures and features, and use copied or formulaic language and some basic writing conventions.**

In this text the writer keeps to word boundaries, writes on the line and groups information within sentences using standard word order, although punctuation and capitalisation are inconsistent. Basic conjunctions are used to connect ideas **A**. Letters are consistently written the same way although there are problems with the relative sizes of some letters, eg. 't' and 'l' compared with 'e' **B** and there is potential confusion over the formation of 'r', i.e. it is too close to the conventional 'h' **C**.

This text demonstrates many skills relevant to SL Writing. However, while direct support (e.g. recourse to copying) is essential at the SL Stage, the student will need to be able to attempt a more independent writing task before she can be established at Stage SL.

An <sup>D</sup> animals is are very big whale  
A <sup>D</sup> whale is ~~###~~ <sup>D</sup> animals - <sup>C</sup> very  
big a whale <sup>E</sup> <sup>B</sup> <sup>A</sup>  
A zebra can eat glass  
A

**Task:** Write an informative text about animals.

**Context:** The text was written by a fourteen-year-old boy in Year 8 in an English language centre. He had had almost no schooling in his first country. The text was written as part of a unit on animals. The class wrote the text with reference to flashcards left on the board, and a vocabulary bank.

**What the text shows**

This text relates to mid-stage SL. It provides an opportunity to record student progress towards the achievement of the following outcomes:

**SL.1 Communicate simple messages, ideas and experiences through drawing, copied writing and own writing.**

The writer demonstrates an ability to write and copy some well known words and to approximate conventional letter formation.

**SL.2 Show an awareness of some of the conventions used for organising written text and the purposes and audiences for which texts are written.**

The writing is appropriately sized.

**SL.3 Write simple texts based on familiar linguistic structures and features, and use copied or formulaic language and some basic writing conventions.**

The writer forms letters consistently and keeps to the line reasonably well. Word boundaries are also kept to with one exception <sup>A</sup>. Information is grouped within sentences, with both standard <sup>B</sup> and non-standard <sup>C</sup> word order being used (e.g. Animals - very big a whale). There is some capitalisation <sup>D</sup> and one full stop <sup>E</sup>.

This text demonstrates a number of skills relevant to SL Writing. The student will need to be able to write on standard line sizes and to use basic conjunctions to be assessed as established at the SL Stage. Greater experimentation with, and use of, punctuation would also be looked for.

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## Program 2

### Handout 4

Roundtable discussion: Meeting the needs of ESL learners with disrupted schooling.

1. What social effects might trauma have on student behaviour?

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2. What effects can past experiences have on learner knowledge and skills?

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3. What can teachers do to assist these students?

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4. How can schools make arrangements within the school to meet these learners' needs?

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5. How can schools foster parent understanding of the school system and its demands?

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6. What resources can schools use to meet the needs of these ESL learners?

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## Resources

### Organisations and Websites

ESL Strategy Team

Student Programs Division

Office of School Education

Telephone: 9637 2039, [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl)

ESL Project Officers: Languages and Multicultural Education Resources Centre, 9349 2400

Interpreting and Translating for Victorian government schools:

[www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/einter.htm#guide](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/einter.htm#guide)

Multilingual school notices: [www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/multi.htm](http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/multi.htm)

Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST): [www.survivorsvic.org.au](http://www.survivorsvic.org.au)

Foundation House

Telephone: 9388 0022

\*Australian Literacy Educators Association: [www.alea.edu.au/index.htm](http://www.alea.edu.au/index.htm)

\*Victorian Association of Teachers of TESOL and Multicultural Education (VATME):

[www.vatme.vic.edu.au](http://www.vatme.vic.edu.au)

### Teaching materials

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