

IMPROVING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

CARRINGBUSH ADULT EDUCATION– A SKILLS FIRST TRAINING PROVIDER CASE STUDY

Carringbush Adult Education provides English language courses to disadvantaged learners in Richmond and Collingwood.

The Training Provider delivers pre-accredited Certificate I to Certificate III English language courses through the Adult Migrant Education Program, Skills for Education and Employment and *Skills First* programs, as well as pre-accredited Learn Local English language programs.

The changing needs of learners

While Carringbush has successfully delivered English language courses since 1984, its manager Margaret Corrigan says the training provider started to recognise the needs of its learners had changed.

In the past, many students could find work in the local area after developing basic English language skills at Carringbush. However, jobs that accept a low standard of English skill are no longer found. Literacy is now more important for most jobs, even those considered to be low skilled.

This new skills demand is difficult for learners as some recent migrants have no previous experience of formal education, and some are from cultures with oral traditions with no foundations of reading and writing.

New skills needed for teachers

While Carringbush's teachers are highly educated, with some holding Masters qualifications, they identified a lack of specific skills to respond to the changing backgrounds, circumstances and needs of their students.

"We research best practice from around the world and put it into practice so that our teachers can best help our students to learn."

Margaret Corrigan, Manager, Carringbush Adult Education

Teachers initially completed the international standard Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS) course which deepened their ability to improve student learning.

This began an ongoing journey for Carringbush into building the capabilities of its teachers. Its approach is to identify the specific needs of learners, research how to respond most effectively to these needs, and then enact that research.

As a non-profit training provider, Carringbush has limited funds for these activities. Therefore, it has helped its teachers successfully apply for fellowships from the International Specialised Skills Institute (ISSI), and has won funding from Victoria's Adult Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board. This has enabled staff members to further develop their skills, attend intensive English language teaching courses overseas, and to participate in international conferences and other events.

Better outcomes for students

Carringbush and its teachers have a commitment to continuous improvement in teaching English language and literacy.

For example, Carringbush identified that English pronunciation is now a key skill required by students when seeking employment. In response, it has researched and implemented best practice approaches to effectively teaching pronunciation.

Carringbush has also found work experience opportunities for students, so students gain a better understanding of the advantages that higher quality English language skills offer when finding employment. Margaret says while some students may still struggle to find long-term employment, they build their understanding of why education is so important and further support their children's learning.

Anecdotal evidence from students indicates that Carringbush is generating positive outcomes. The students build confidence, participate more in their local communities and find what Margaret calls 'pathways to optimism'. With support from the ACFE Board, Carringbush has a research program underway to provide evidence that its teaching practices are generating positive outcomes for students.

Sustainable results

An important element to Carringbush's commitment to quality teaching is making sure that if teachers move on, their knowledge isn't lost.

Teachers share their skills with each other, and Carringbush is currently making a video resource of its teachers in practice so it has a resource base to share, including with other English language teaching providers.

Carringbush has also developed partnerships with organisations that have expertise in teaching English language skills, such as LaTrobe University.

Carringbush staff also attend Australian and international conferences on English language teaching, extending its research and

conversations across the world. For example, Margaret recently attended the Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching (PSLLT) conference in Utah, United States with her Carringbush colleague, Liz Keenan. Margaret was also a presenter at the conference, sharing Carringbush's journey of developing a systematic approach to research to inform classroom teaching practices.

"As we become more effective in how we teach English to our learners, we increase the pathways for them to improve their lives."

Margaret Corrigan, Manager, Carringbush Adult Education
