

# ESOL Online

## The 1000 Word Little Language

### Introduction by Juliet Fry

The 1000 Word Little Language was produced by the English Language Institute at Victoria University. While teaching at Northcote College, Mary Matthew developed the examples and exercises, particularly with the group of Karen students from Burma/Myanmar in mind.

The following year we had them printed at school and made into spiral-bound workbooks and sold them for \$5.00 through the school stationary shop. Students who had an Elementary ESOL option were required to purchase them although the refugee students and a few others got copies paid for from the MOE funding. If schools do produce the workbook in such a way, please don't try to make a profit on it. Mary wants this material to be accessible to all students who need it in NZ schools.

You can change the title page to have your school's name on it, but please keep the authors acknowledged. The 7th sentence in the exercises can also be changed to have your school address.

### **Value of the vocab list with examples**

The Karen students spoke and wrote in a variety of languages - Burmese, Karen and Thai, and had quite varied competency in English. The students wrote the meanings of the words in their preferred language(s), after negotiating the meaning in a mix of languages between themselves. They were very keen and quickly produced their own dictionaries. So having a student-generated bi-lingual/multi-lingual dictionary was a valuable shared activity at the time the students developed it.

The students referred to the dictionary later on. The fact that it was alphabetical meant that later reference was easy. Having generated half of the bi-lingual dictionary themselves, the students were familiar with the contents and often used it to check words that they half knew.

### **Problems with the vocab list with examples**

Of course it seems quite boring.

Another problem is that the words are alphabetical and out of context- neither fact generating optimal learning conditions.

Slick electronic dictionary users preferred to use their own dictionaries.

### **Value of the exercises**

I used the exercises the following year at Northcote College with an elementary class consisting of equal numbers of international students, permanent residents, including some from refugee backgrounds.

Students did 10 words each night for homework and we marked them quickly at the beginning of each class. The students really liked the routine and the security of having a write-on booklet. The structure of it was probably more akin to their prior educational experiences than much of what happened at school in NZ. The students got a lot better as the year progressed and as new students joined the class, old hands who had initially been very coy and afraid to make mistakes, enjoyed showing off and contributing answers to our daily marking sessions. I think the routine and very structured exercises actually created a safe enough context for some students to participate in. It was fine to make mistakes in the daily exercises. However, we had a test every Monday and the students kept a graph of their scores in their exercise books. They quite liked trying to keep up their high marks. I recorded their marks so it was also easy for me to report on some very quantitative "marks" or progress.

### **Problems with the exercises**

They were time-consuming. By the time we had done this and other regular activities we were short on time for language development in topic studies. This was really frustrating as I know these topic studies were very valuable integrated learning opportunities.

Again the words were out of context. However, as they were all high frequency words, the students would be meeting them in other subjects. The words were used in sentences in the exercises and the dictionary so at least they were embedded in common surrounding words.

### **Conclusion**

The vocab exercises make good homework activities. The activities do need follow-up in class. However they should not drive the teaching programme. They make a very useful tool, amongst others, for learning vocabulary.

Mary has kindly made them available for us. Comments to [Juliet.fry@cce.ac.nz](mailto:Juliet.fry@cce.ac.nz).

Mary's words:

"I'm pleased to have the Little Language vocabulary and exercises available free on line to teachers who are prepared to feed back

corrections, suggestions and findings, and possibly to pool resources."

Resources can be shared through the [Teacher Resource Exchange](#).

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