

# **The Virtual ILC gets Real and Easy**

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## **VATME Newsletter**

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If you haven't visited the Virtual ILC lately, or if you've never been at all, you're in for a pleasant surprise. This year there's a new look, a new address ([www.virtualilc.com](http://www.virtualilc.com)), and lots of new content. Up until this year there was only one lot of content, which was tasks based on the CSWE. All of the CSWE tasks are still there, but new groups of tasks, and lots of other types of material, have been added. The content is now in three broad categories - Realweb, Easymedia and Checkout. Realweb is collections of language learning tasks based on various curriculums. Easymedia provides learning activities based on media resources. Checkout provides a collection of learning and information resources. Let's have a closer look at each one. (Because the site is constantly in development, when you visit the site the contents may not be displayed exactly as described.)

The main strand in Realweb is Realweb CSWE, which is all of last year's tasks, plus many new ones. Realweb CSWE is a collection of over 400 language learning tasks created by more than 60 language teachers from around Australia, based on the Certificates in Spoken and Written English. A second strand in Realweb is Realweb Workcom, which provides tasks based on industry needs. A strand is currently under development for the Curriculum Standards Framework ESL Companion, as well as another one for the CGEA.

What makes Realweb unusual is that the teachers create the tasks, but not the content of the task. A paper-based equivalent of this would be a teacher creating a worksheet to accompany a chapter from a textbook, or some other piece of realia. The teacher doesn't have to write the book or create the realia, just "frame" their content for a particular curriculum goal. In Realweb the tasks are all based on websites that teachers have discovered, but not created themselves. For example, one teacher has created a series of tasks based on the Immigration Museum of Melbourne's site. Teachers are able to create tasks without having to learn html (hypertext markup language) though if they wish they can use html in their task creation. Realweb is proof that a very simple idea can be very effective - Realweb CSWE went from 5 logins in February 1999 to over 21,000 in December!

We are very keen to encourage teachers to become involved in task creation for any of the Realweb strands. You can attend training sessions at AMES, or AMES Online Services can run a training session onsite for you. The one-day training session not only gets you up and running on VILC, with your very own learning tasks presented for the world to see (and use), but it leads into other training in online learning. If your employer supports you in your task creation, they (as well as you, the creator) receive acknowledgement. It makes a good activity for a curriculum day, and it's relevant to more than the ESL teachers.

The second group of content is Easymedia. It has only one strand at present, Easynews Radio. Easynews Radio is a weekly collection of language learning task based on the previous week's SBS Radio News. Users can choose to hear the item, hear it and see the transcript, and/or hear it and do an learning activity. There are up to ten items each week, grouped into intermediate and advanced, and previous weeks' items remain available if a user wanted to follow a particular story over time. There are about half a dozen exercise types, and answers are available immediately. We have plans to develop Easynews video, as well as some soapie strands, including a reprise of Using the System. Easynews Radio is not based on any particular curriculum, and is proving very popular already. If your Internet access is slow you can download the files for local use, so don't let that put you off.

The third category, Checkout, invites teachers and learners to check out some other general resources. Downunder is a piece of hypertext fiction aimed at language learners. It provides alternative pathways through a story about an alien invasion of a future Earth which is semi-submerged due to the greenhouse effect. It contains suggestions to teachers for use, but does not offer tasks to learners. 510 Hours is a collection of stories from AMEP learners about how they used their 510 hours of language learning in the AMEP. Tasks for learners are provided. Further strands of content are planned.

Although the initial development of VILC was funded by OTFE, since last year it has depended on annual user fees for its income. Fees are currently \$300 per strand for unlimited teacher and learner use. Fees are paid by providers, not teachers and learners. Access to AMEP providers has been sponsored by DIMA for the last two years.

Where Internet access is limited, and curriculum goals need to be met, the Virtual ILC offers teachers the ability to provide focused structured learning activities based on real Web resources. Where such restrictions do not apply, it provides a rich resource for exploration and learning. There are now users in all over Australia, in New Zealand, Indonesia and Vietnam. It's the easiest starting point there is for anyone interested in online learning, whether you simply want to recommend tasks to learners or create tasks yourself. To find out more visit the site at [www.virtualilc.com](http://www.virtualilc.com) or ring (03) 9926 4677.