

## English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources

### Synopsis

The aim of the research project was to identify and describe a range of current ESOL practices and establish some of the distinctive features of ESOL learners in numeracy, literacy and dedicated ESOL classes. Five case study sites were selected to cover different types of provision, different groups of learners and different levels of English language competence. The research was carried out between January and September 2003 by teams at Kings College London, Lancaster University, the Institute of Education, University of London and University of Leeds by NRDC as part of the centre's work in support of *Skills for Life*.

The detailed accounts of classroom practices and learners' needs and resources show that ESOL learners differ in many ways from other adult basic skills learners. Many are professionals with successful careers and many are changed by past trauma and fearful of the future. These differences impact on their ability to learn, their ambitions and their sense of themselves. Despite of, or because of these differences, the picture that emerges is of creative learners who make the classroom a place where they can make meanings relevant to their lives and their futures.

### Key Points

❑ An emphasis on individualised teaching and learning may not support the needs of adult ESOL learners. Talk is work in the ESOL classroom and the most significant mode of learning for ESOL

learners is through group interaction and opportunities to practise speaking and listening.

❑ Effective teachers of ESOL employ a series of measures to support the needs of ESOL learners in the classroom. Mainstream teachers need to learn from these approaches to better support the needs of ESOL students in their classrooms.

❑ There is a need for more pro-active cross-agency support for refugees and asylum seekers. ESOL teachers in most classes were juggling a number of roles and lack the institutional support and specialist knowledge to do so.

❑ The use of everyday, culturally-specific situations to contextualise maths problems may act as a barrier to attainment by ESOL learners in numeracy classes.

❑ Learners use their other languages in concrete and strategic ways to help them to learn English. Teachers can facilitate this in many ways with strategies to encourage the use of learners' other languages within teaching and learning English.

❑ The involvement of learners in the planning and reviewing of their learning through individual learning plans is only meaningful if they have both the language and the linguistic awareness to do this. For the process to be meaningful, ESOL learners' other languages and/or interpreters need to be used.

## What did each case study look at?

### Case study one – Asylum

This case study focuses on exploring the impact of social issues on the learning of ESOL students at Entry level 1 studying at a Further Education College in the North West of England. In particular it addresses the role of educational provision in orientation and pastoral support.

### Case study two – Heterogeneity

Learners in ESOL classes have very different, diverse past educational experiences, needs, (language) skills, and perspectives on learning. While this heterogeneity is commonly viewed as something "brought along" to the ESOL classroom by learners, this case study focuses on how heterogeneity is produced within classroom practices by learners and teachers.

### Case study three – ESOL and numeracy

This study investigates the pedagogies and practices in culturally and linguistically diverse ESOL and numeracy classrooms in a large multi-site college. It asks if there are differences in the ways that cultural and linguistic diversity is experienced and managed by both teachers and students in the ESOL and numeracy classrooms and if there are lessons to be learnt from one environment which can profitably inform the others.

### Case study four – Reading

This study focuses on the teaching of reading in two college ESOL classes in London. It explores the question of how the linguistic and cultural strengths and resources of the ESOL learners are taken into account in the choice of texts and reading methodologies.

### Case study five – Bridge to work

This case study looks at an ESOL course for advanced learners with professional skills and experience which brings together in one package an introduction to the world of work in the UK, job search skills and language learning. It draws conclusions on learners' ability to reflect on and predict their language development, ways in which the learners needs are addressed in the classroom and the use learners and teachers make of English encountered outside the classroom.

## Methodology

Case study methodology involves looking at one set of activities in a very detailed and concrete way so that new insights and ways of looking at the problem are revealed. The aim is to stimulate creative thinking and disturb general assumptions. Case studies also reveal the complexities of the practices observed and so help to explain why so often general maxims about what is effective do not work out in real life. Just as the microscope reveals teeming life in a speck of material,

so the case study method provides a new lens for looking at one case. Each case study represents a 'telling case' (Mitchell 1984) out of which theory, concepts and hypotheses can be drawn, leading to further research.

## References and further reading

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