



National Research and Development Centre  
for adult literacy and numeracy

# Research Review

## Adult ESOL pedagogy:

a review of research, an annotated bibliography and recommendations for future research.

### Synopsis

This review covers research into the learning of English in classroom settings by adult speakers of other languages (ESOL). It was produced as part of NRDC's work in support of *Skills for Life*. A section on learners and learning is concerned with studies of the process of language learning, including factors such as age, aptitude, personality and motivation. A section on teachers, classrooms and tasks discusses research which investigates the relationships between teaching and learning, including the learning of language form and uptake. A section on ESOL literacy is concerned with research into the teaching and learning of the written language. A section on organisation of provision looks at issues of policy, intensity of provision, language support and work-place provision. There is a further section on research methods and a short section of assessment procedures.

### Key Points

☒ Actual pedagogic practice. It is recommended that a large scale study of actual practice in different settings is carried out. Alongside this larger study there should be a number of smaller ethnographic studies of good practice in ESOL classes, covering: learners with little prior experience of the written language; bilingual literacy provision; workplace courses; and language support on mainstream courses. The aim of these studies is to provide accounts that can be disseminated to other practitioners.

☒ Teaching and learning processes. There should be ongoing research into the relationships between

teaching and learning in formal contexts. This could be based around a programme of practitioner research, with support from established researchers. This research should explore:

- specific classroom tasks to address issues of accuracy and fluency in the spoken language
- an investigation of different media of learning, including written materials and new technology
- learners' discursive experiences and practices outside the classroom, and how classroom practices can take account of them
- learners' expectations and learning strategies.

☒ The learners. Studies tracking learners through different kinds of provision would give more information about particular sorts of learners and their learning experiences both in and out of classrooms, and provide an account of pedagogic practice from their position, including:

- learners with very little previous experience of literacy, or of formal education
- learners who arrive in the UK with professional qualifications and experience, but low levels of English
- learners whose first language is an English based Creole or dialect
- learners with trauma.

☒ Theories of language and language learning. Developments in theoretical approaches and broader understandings of the nature of language and literacy need to continue and to be applied to the UK ESOL situation. Seminars for key researchers and theorists should be held in order to make explicit and develop an appropriate theory of language learning that could underpin the national curriculum and new teacher training programmes.

## Background and rationale of research

This report is one of the first literature reviews completed by the DfES funded National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC). The report discusses research into the learning of English in classroom settings by adult speakers of other languages (ESOL). It was completed in July 2002; it was written to inform NRDC research activities and to support the development of ESOL research more generally.

## Main elements of research

This report focuses on learners who need English for the UK workplace, for study in further and higher education and for living in the community. The review mainly concentrates on research that has taken place in the last 15 years and it has attempted to include all of the research that has been carried out within the UK. As most of this has been fairly small scale or not directly concerned with pedagogy, research that has been carried out in the USA, Australia, Canada and Europe is also included and its relevance to the UK context is discussed.

Each of the main sections contains a list of research issues which arise as a result of the review of the literature and the report concludes with a set of recommendations for research. Accompanying the report is an annotated bibliography of all the research that has been consulted in the survey that forms the basis of this report.

## Research team

### Project Director

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## References and further reading

- American Institutes for Research (2002). "What Works" **Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students: Research Challenges and Descriptive Findings**. Volume II: Final Report. American Institutes for Research, Washington.
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- Perdue, C., Ed. (1993). **Adult language acquisition: cross-linguistic perspectives. Volume 1: Field Methods, Volume 2: the results**. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Wrigley, H. and G. Guth (1992). **Bringing Literacy to Life: Issues and options in Adult ESL literacy**. San Diego, Ca., Dominic Press
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The full report will be available from September 2003 in PDF and Word formats from NRDC's website at

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