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for adult literacy and numeracy

# Research Report

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

Celia Roberts, Mike Baynham, Paul Shrubshall, David Barton,  
Priti Chopra, Melanie Cooke, Rachel Hodge, Kathy Pitt,  
Philida Schellekens, Catherine Wallace and Shelly Whitfield

Kings College London, University of Leeds, Institute of  
Education, University of London and Lancaster University  
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## Preface

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The ESOL classroom is a complex and varied environment. *“English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources”* is both a celebration and an examination of that diversity.

The five case studies in this report show some of the formal contexts in which ESOL learning takes place. They look at community-based and FE classrooms with learners ranging from Entry 1 to Level 2.

Despite the heterogeneous nature of ESOL learners and the ESOL classroom, common themes emerge. In all the case studies it is clear how successfully the ESOL teachers create safe and productive environments for their learners. However, it is also clear that many need to develop the skills and knowledge to provide the wider support that many of their learners require. There is an urgent need for a more strategic approach to cross-agency support for ESOL learners. Another recurring message is the intuitive notion that in an ESOL class, group work is the dominant mode and that all talk is of value; to quote from the report “talk is work in the ESOL classroom”. The tensions between this and the increasing individualisation of ESOL teaching through Individual Learning Plans are also addressed.

*“English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) - case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources”* also highlights some of the distinctive features of ESOL learners, both in what they bring to the classroom and the implications of this for teaching. ESOL teaching is more than language tuition and the case studies highlight this in a number of different ways. They give an insight into the differing barriers ESOL learners face and the motivation and support they need to overcome them.

These case studies will be of interest to all those involved in the delivery of ESOL or the support of those for whom English is not a first language. They present a recognisably complex picture of the classroom and the factors that bear on the success of those within it.

The NRDC is committed to further research on ESOL and on issues relevant to ESOL learners, including refugees and asylum seekers, citizenship, and the relationship between ESOL learning and literacy and numeracy learning. We have embarked on a three year study: ‘Effective Practice in Teaching and Learning ESOL’ which will deepen our understanding of the issues raised in the case studies which illuminate this report.

**Ursula Howard**

*Director, NRDC*

*Institute of Education, University of London*

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### *Peer Review*

This text was independently peer-reviewed.

## Summary of key points arising from the case studies

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Although several of the insights into classrooms and learners' lives will be familiar to highly experienced ESOL practitioners, the aim has been to shed light on what is routine and taken for granted by looking at it in new ways. The tacit knowledge and daily expertise of ESOL teachers are under-researched and under-celebrated. This has meant that 'wheels are reinvented' and good practice goes unacknowledged. These case studies will help to refocus on the detail of classroom life and to value the teachers and learners who help to produce a creative learning environment. The case studies project suggests that:

- 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 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.
- It may be that the involvement of learners in the planning and reviewing of their learning through individual learning plans is not meaningful, as language learners appear unable to reflect on and predict their language development, even when they have an advanced level of English.

This research is the first of several ESOL research studies. Details of NRDC's Effective Practice project is given overleaf.

### Other research on ESOL

#### Overview of NRDC's effective practice studies

NRDC has embarked on five major related projects, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), designed to identify effective teaching and learning practices in the areas of ESOL, reading, writing, numeracy and ICT. The projects run from 2003 to 2006. They build on methodological insights from the influential American Institutes of Research report, 'What Works Study for Adult ESL Literacy Students' (Condelli 2002).

The projects aim to identify 'what works'; that is, the teaching activities that help to develop and improve language, literacy and numeracy skills. Research will identify correlations between teaching interventions and learners' progress and attainments and in particular, the classroom and teaching variables that can be correlated with improving learners' language, literacy and numeracy development and achievement. Synergy will be sought between all five studies, drawing out key messages across all the projects. This integrated approach will ensure that issues which are relevant to a particular group, e.g. ESOL learners, can be gathered from a range of settings and **Skills for Life** subjects.

**ESOL effective teaching and learning study**

In the ESOL study, research instruments have been developed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data on ESOL provision. Classroom observations will reflect practice through the analysis of specific and general teaching strategies, as well as opportunities for learner involvement. All instruments have been validated and piloted and are now in use in the first cycle of data gathering (February - June 2004). Learners are assessed twice using an oral test which has been developed in conjunction with the examination board Cambridge ESOL. Researchers gather biographical data from learners and teachers by means of questionnaires and ethnographic interviews. The researchers are trained to carry out ethnographic interviews and will train community interpreters to do the same. This is to ensure that learners with low levels of oracy will be able to participate as fully as higher level learners. Classes are being observed in venues across England.

The ESOL effective practice project (EEPP) is led by Leeds University (project leader Mike Baynham) and King's College, London (project leader Celia Roberts).

*The key contact for the five effective practice projects at the NRDC is John Vorhaus - j.vorhaus@ioe.ac.uk*



## Introduction

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The language, literacy and numeracy needs of people from linguistic minority backgrounds are distinctive in many ways and yet adult basic education does not always address these differences. The literature review *Adult ESOL Pedagogy* (Barton and Pitt 2002) indicates that there is relatively little research in this area in the UK. We lag behind North America and Australia both in survey type research on effective provision and in smallscale qualitative studies which shed light on theoretical and conceptual issues. This case study project had a dual focus:

- **To examine some of the practices in a wide variety of classes.**
- **To establish some of the distinctive features of ESOL learners and provision to inform literacy and numeracy research.**

Five case studies were selected to show the diversity in types of provision and learners and included both dedicated ESOL classes and other provision: numeracy classes and a bridge to work course. Case study methodology was used with a focus on ethnographic research methods. The detailed descriptions in the case studies are illuminating in their own right. In addition, the resonances from comparing and contrasting the different cases have helped to draw out concepts and insights transferable to other research settings.

### Aim and research questions

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.

Specifically to:

- Identify the relationship between teaching/learning processes in ESOL classes and learners' perceptions, expectations and ways of learning transferred from their first language and previous socialisation.
- Understand some of the distinctive features of ESOL learners in literacy and numeracy classes. In the longer term, examine these features in mainstream academic and vocational provision.
- Use this knowledge to build capacity for further research in ESOL provision, pedagogy and learner needs and resources, and to give advice and support to literacy and numeracy research and teaching.
- Establish appropriate methods and practices for researching culturally and linguistically diverse learner groups.

The case studies were selected to cover different types of provision: college based, community based, employer based; different groups of learners: asylum seekers, job seekers with professional backgrounds, heterogeneous groups in the community and young people; different levels of language competence from basic to advanced.

The project ran from January to September 2003.

# Summary of the case studies

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## Case study one - Asylum issues

### **“This is not enough for one’s life”: perceptions of living and learning English in Blackburn by students seeking asylum and refugee status**

This case study looks at issues around the particular needs of students seeking asylum and the role of educational provision in providing support since the initiation of the government dispersal policy in 2001. The focus is on exploring the relationship between language learning needs and broader social needs with recently arrived students in an Entry Level 1 class at Blackburn College. Using an ethnographic, multi-method, collaborative approach, the case study gives details of student needs, constraints they face in meeting these needs, how the ESOL class meets their needs and the wider institutional support.

Students expressed three major needs: the need for more independence, choice and control over their lives; the need to learn English quickly and to a standard which will enable them to enter the workforce; and the need and desire to integrate into British society and make a home here in the fullest sense.

The teacher and students have successfully created a very supportive learning and social environment in the ESOL classroom. The ESOL teacher is their main advocate and like the other ESOL teacher, takes on the additional roles of social worker and counsellor. The teachers feel overwhelmed with the demands of supporting this group of students. The college and other agencies have not received adequate training and preparation to be able to respond holistically to the learning and social needs which will help these students build on their existing skills, experience and qualifications. Recommendations at government, local authority and college level relate to these holistic needs.

*Rachel Hodge and Kathy Pitt with David Barton*

## Case study two - Heterogeneity

### **“We mingle with each other like friends”: heterogeneity, responsibility and resourcefulness in community ESOL classes**

The two classrooms studied here are heterogeneous in different ways. In one class the group is diverse in both levels of English, linguistic backgrounds and purposes. In the other, there is also a marked difference in levels but all learners share a common first language. However, heterogeneity is not just something ‘brought along’ to the ESOL classroom. This case study looks at how heterogeneity is *produced* within the classroom practices of two community-based classrooms with learners from Entry 1 to Entry 3 in the first class and at different stages of Entry 1 in the second class. Micro-ethnographic analysis of classroom data shows how seemingly narrow, language focused activities are multi-layered activities in which learner resources and learner control surface.

Rania, the teacher in the first class, facilitates a set of accommodating practices which transform routine tasks into opportunities for multi-layered communication. What we call

'fast grammar packages' are opened up by the learners to allow for differences which then have to be managed. The notion of 'repair' rather than simple correction explains how learners manage social relations, personal opinions and grammatical concepts as well as dealing with form-focused language work. In the second class, Louise, a monolingual English speaker, allows and sometimes encourages the use of Tamil so that learners can become teachers at specific moments.

Far from heterogeneity being a problem, it is a feature of classroom life which can transform routine tasks into many layered language use. Overt structures and predictable tasks go hand in hand with improvisation and linguistic creativity. Analysing this heterogeneity sheds light on the learners as active, complex beings – an identity often masked by the 'infantilising' of ESOL classrooms. Teachers who acknowledge and facilitate learners' complex social identities may be able to motivate learners to continue attendance over long periods even when dramatic progress is unlikely. Suggestions are made as to how this analysis of learners' use of language can enrich the descriptions in the ESOL Core Curriculum.

*Paul Shrubshall, Priti Chopra and Celia Roberts*

### **Case study three - Numeracy and ESOL**

#### **Bilingual students learning in ESOL and numeracy classes: a contrastive case study of classroom diversity**

This is a case study of differences in numeracy and ESOL classes characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity. Two ESOL classes at Entry Level 2 and Entry Level 2/3 were compared with a numeracy/ESOL class and a Return to Learning for Numeracy class. While all classes shared values and principles related to adult learning, the shape of the learning was different.

Group work was the primary mode of learning in ESOL classrooms but it was much less central to numeracy classes, and it seemed to mean something different in the numeracy and ESOL classrooms. Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and individual worksheets, typical of basic education practices and of the numeracy classes, emphasise individual learning at the expense of group processes. Similarly, while talk supports learning in the numeracy classes, talk *is* the learning in ESOL classrooms. Here, language and cultural knowledge and practices *are* the curriculum, whereas in numeracy classes talk functions as it would among a group at work where talk is incidental to the task at hand.

In the ESOL classes, many of the students are professionals with high academic and career ambitions held back by language. This changing distinctive profile blurs the distinction between EFL and ESOL. It also means that in numeracy classes the ESOL learners had high levels of numeracy. However, they were constrained by the very practices designed to help them: the use of ordinary situations to contextualise maths problems and make them meaningful. ESOL numeracy learners have to cope with learning the register of maths in English and the cultural knowledge required to make sense of contextualised maths problems. These contrasts between ESOL and numeracy classes have implications for teaching numeracy to ESOL learners.

*Mike Baynham and Shelly Whitfield*

## Case study four - Reading

### Inside Out/Outside In: a study of reading in ESOL classrooms

This case study looks at how 'outside knowledge' of the world is used in the interpretation of texts in the ESOL classroom. In particular, it looks at the interaction between the teacher, the reading text and the task, on the one hand and the learners and the resources they bring to the reading activity on the other. Two classes, which were both diverse in terms of language backgrounds, social identity and length of time in Britain were researched. One class was at Entry Level 3 and the other at Level 1. In both cases, reading activities were an integral part of the whole ESOL course.

Micro-ethnography of the classes shed light on the importance of the choice of materials and how they were deployed. The choice of text was crucial. Many learners were critical of readings taken from text books, which one student called 'a dead mouse' as compared with authentic material from the media. More authentic and contemporary texts also led to more participation and discussion than the bland text-book readings. How the materials were used was as important as the choice of texts. The extent to which the reading activities were teacher-directed and how far teachers built on the shared resources of the class affected the quality of learning and learner motivation.

Learners were active participants when discussing tasks from authentic texts but were limited by the tasks. The texts carried too much meaning for the tasks set and learners were only sometimes able to exploit their rich linguistic, cultural and social resources, which were glimpsed in the data.

This case study showed that there was untapped learning potential which could be addressed by focusing more on choice of texts and their use. More extensive use of contemporary texts is recommended. Learners could be given more control of the planning and selecting of texts and tasks so that the teacher is not the exclusive knower of the text. Reading activities could be more differentiated so that not each text was presented through a comprehension – type task.

*Melanie Cooke and Catherine Wallace with Paul Shrubshall*

## Case study five - Advanced learners

### Bridge to Work: a course for professionals with advanced English language skills

Experienced professionals with skills to offer need a 'bridge' to the British workplace. The 'Bridge to Work' course run by Croydon Education and Training Services is a ten week full-time course. It consists of three aspects: introduction to the world of work, job search skills and advanced language learning. Participants were from medical and educational backgrounds and other professions such as accountancy and engineering.

The language classes were characterised by a 'multi- strand' approach in which the ESOL tutor combined the teaching of institutional knowledge, opportunities for extended talk, help with word meanings and pronunciation practice. Linguistic and cultural difficulties were often anticipated, exemplifying the comfortable environment created for learners. By contrast, the subject tutor made little or no concession to their gaps in linguistic and cultural knowledge.

The learners were unable to be analytical about their communication needs and their language use outside the classroom, nor could they analyse the differences in the approach between the ESOL and subject classrooms. This suggests that more needs to be done to help learners reflect on their language needs and learning if, as the **Skills for Life** strategy proposes, learners should be involved in planning and reviewing their learning. A further 'bridge' in this bridging course would be between the language class and the world-of-work subject class. In the former, the anticipating and fine-tuning to learners' needs meant that they did not *have to* manage problems of understanding. In the latter class, lack of language awareness meant that they *could* not manage them. Yet the management of communication difficulties in the real world is what these high-level job seekers have to face.

*Philida Schellekens*

## Overarching themes

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'Traditionally little leeway is given to the creative language capacity of the learner and the common way of thinking and theorising about second language acquisition is strongly influenced by this procedure: learning a second language is putting one piece of the puzzle in place after the other, until the replica is complete. But we do not think that this is the way in which the human language capacity, including the learning capacity, works.' (Klein and Perdue 1993: 39)

### Learners and learning

- The picture that emerges from these case studies is of highly creative learners. Rather than piecing together items of language from 'input', learners are exposed to opportunities or 'affordances' from which they select meanings that relate to their immediate environment. (van Lier 2002). For example, in case study two, learners used a past tense exercise to both create and manage a face-threatening moment and so develop their interactional competence from quite a meagre initial task.
- Learners are often more resourceful and knowing than either the teacher or the task allows for. Tasks are too narrow for learners' resources. For example, in case study four, the reading tasks constrained the learners whose substantial knowledge and interests go beyond the comprehension exercise.
- Most of the classes in the case studies contained at least some refugees and asylum seekers. These new arrivals have a raft of social, psychological and economic needs, related to their status, which set them apart from other basic skills learners. Many are exposed to racism and many have experienced severe trauma. For example, in case study one, the learners at Blackburn College had to cope with fears from the past and anxieties about the future while trying to learn a new language. This raises vital issues about the importance of a more holistic service for learners from vulnerable groups. More generally, there is a need for more debate, research and thinking about mental health in the **Skills for Life** strategy.
- However, most of the classes also contained highly skilled, professional people with a fierce desire to find work commensurate with their qualifications (and these were often the same people as those just mentioned). These are not basic skills learners but sophisticated, highly educated people with considerable cultural capital. With these groups, the distinction between ESOL and EFL becomes blurred. For example, in case study five, learners needed

strategies for anticipating potential miscommunication in professional contexts.

- Friendships and mutuality are persistently developed by learners and facilitated by teachers. For many learners the classroom is their main reference group, sometimes the most motivating aspect of their lives – what helps them to get up in the morning (see case study one). For some learners who are long-term residents in Britain, these friendships, which often extend beyond the classroom, motivate them to *maintain* their English. In these contexts, language maintenance can be viewed as a kind of progression.
- Learners often use their first language (L1) to work out meanings. This can be a short-cut both in puzzling out grammatical concepts and word meanings and in facilitating tasks, as the use of Tamil in case study two shows.

### **The ESOL classroom**

- Talk *is* work in the ESOL classroom. The language and cultural processes of the classroom *are* the curriculum. Talk is not an adjunct to learning or a social pause but is the reason for being in the classroom. So, for example, in case study three, numeracy learning could take place in relative silence while in the ESOL classroom all talk was useful.
- Because of the centrality of talk, the most significant mode of learning is through group processes. The focus on individual learning and ILPs can be at the expense of these group processes. (Again see case study three).
- Heterogeneity in the ESOL classroom is not only brought along but produced in the classes. This is partly achieved through the way in which differentiation is managed through talk, whereas in literacy and numeracy classes, this is done through worksheets. Heterogeneity is also produced by learners' creative use of opportunities, as discussed above.

### **Language and the ESOL curriculum**

- The learners' use of language in the classroom shows that language development must be viewed as a complex, non-linear system. Much of the language use visible in the case study classrooms cannot be neatly tied to curricular objectives. It cannot be dismissed as incidental, since this assumes it is a sideline to the main project: the ordered acquisition of language.
- The detailed analysis of language use shows that social and cultural knowledge is wired into language. Socio-cultural knowledge is traditionally treated as separate from language and taught as facts – for example about institutions and how they work. However, the discussions about begging in case study four and accidents in case study three show that specific institutional knowledge, learners' stance on a topic and their means of self-presentation are interconnected.
- The language and socio-cultural knowledge to manage the numeracy tests is another example of how these two aspects of communication are wired in together. The contextualising of maths problems as mini-narratives (see case study three) creates rather than solves problems.
- A model of second language socialisation is more appropriate than second language acquisition in that it assumes that language is developed through social relationships and prepares learners for communicating in a community of practice. However, even this model cannot fully account for the different goals and identities which participating in complex urban environments entails (Kramsch 2002).
- Targets and the curriculum provide a context for learning but cannot determine what is most

appropriate for particular groups. Learners themselves often navigate the course of learning and are continually recontextualising the often bland and invented worlds of the course materials so that they can make them meaningful to their own lives (see case studies three and four). Similarly, the conversations around tasks which both develop from the tasks and sometimes subvert them (see case study two) are language in use rather than language practice.

- Activities in the language classrooms can be generally related to the ESOL curriculum but describing these activities does not give an account of the rich, multi-layered interaction which constitutes these classes. At the moment, the language we have to describe the language classroom is not adequate. As a result, there is a gap between, on the one hand, curricular specifications and on the other, the communication of intent and the management of social relations evidenced in these classes.
- The language of language learning is even more difficult for learners, whatever their level of competence. As case study five shows, even advanced learners cannot monitor their language behaviour and talk about their language needs. ILPs are often no more than a mantra to 'improve my English' or 'learn more grammar'. There is clearly a need, particularly at more advanced levels, to focus on the language for reflecting about learning, if learners are to gain a greater sense of ownership of their learning.

### **The teachers**

- The responsive ESOL teacher creates a classroom environment which is motivated by the learners' needs and resources rather than any specific teaching theories, ideologies or personal styles. So, for example, in case study one, Wendy at Blackburn College, opted for a highly structured environment because there is so much that is uncertain and traumatic in the learners' lives. Antony, on the other hand, in the ESOL reading class, case study four transformed the reading comprehension task into more of a 'seminar' with text as stimulus for discussion.
- So, ideas about how structured the learning tasks should be or how open or controlled the classroom is, depend less on adherence to a particular set of learning theories or beliefs about social relations in the class and depend more on what seems right for particular learners at particular moments. This kind of flexibility is not always given prominence in teacher training courses.
- This flexibility works also at a local level with teachers tuning into the particular needs and interests of individual learners both within and outside the planned lesson. In this way, structured and predictable elements of the lesson happen alongside the improvised, creative and unpredictable, as with the discussion about the Iraq war in case study two.
- The ESOL teachers in most of these classes – and notably in case study one – were juggling a number of roles. As well as teaching and facilitating the kind of accommodating practices which encouraged interaction and friendship building, they acted as untrained and unpaid social workers and counsellors, interpreters of legal documents and providers of on-going pastoral care. The Blackburn case study shows that teachers have little support or appropriate knowledge and that there is not necessarily much recognition by institutions of these multiple and time-consuming roles. There is clearly a need for a multi-agency approach for working with groups such as these.
- Teachers as well as learners work hard to bring the 'outside world' into the classroom. Research shows that this, generally, is an effective practice (Condelli 2002). However, case study one shows that responsive ESOL teachers only bring the outside world in when the learners in that classroom can bear its weight. Talking about the past may be good for practising verb morphology but deeply traumatic for those who have fled torture and death.

- Teachers put great emphasis on creating a safe environment in two ways. Firstly, for those with a traumatic past, teachers filter out subjects and perspectives which are painful or undermining. Secondly, they create an environment in which learners feel comfortable with asking for clarification and displaying relative incompetence. However, subject teachers, who lack language awareness and may not be able to appreciate the struggle that learners have with a language learner identity, are less likely to be able to create this environment.
- In the past, the traditional language teacher exercised two types of control. They controlled the learning processes and they had absolute authority as legitimate speakers of the target language. These case studies show a new communicative environment in the classroom. Teachers are less concerned about patrolling the uses of language in the classroom. For example, the use of L1, most notable in case study two, was not only tolerated but actively encouraged at strategic moments. Similarly, by relaxing control of what counts as allowable language, learners talk using the resources they have. This means that the expression of complex ideas, the delicate management of social relations and the vocalising of humour and fantasy can all be achieved despite often limited linguistic resources. The infantilising of ESOL learners – because your spoken English is perceived as child-like, you are treated as a child – is challenged by this relaxation of control. Teachers do not need to be in charge of every language moment of the lesson.

## Conclusion

These detailed accounts of classroom practices and learners' needs and resources show that ESOL learners differ, in many ways, from other adult basic education learners. Teaching and learning processes are different in classrooms where talk is work. Theories of language, teaching and learning are most responsive to learners when the significance of social relations and social identities is understood. The focus on individual needs and learning is less appropriate for ESOL classes than literacy and numeracy classes.

The learners themselves rarely conform to more general profiles of 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. For the vulnerable groups, a multi-agency approach is needed so that ESOL tutors are not over-burdened with pastoral and legal matters.

Despite of, or indeed because of the differences between ESOL learners and other groups, the picture that emerges is of creative learners who are often more resourceful than teachers, traditionally allow for. Our studies show that where classes are freed up by teachers, for example, to encourage the use of L1 for ESOL learning, the classroom becomes a place where they can make meanings relevant to their lives and their futures.



## Methodology

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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. As Mitchell says: 'the search for a "typical" case study for analytical exposition is likely to be less fruitful than the search for a "telling" case study in which the particular circumstances surrounding a case, serve to make previously obscure theoretical relationships suddenly apparent.' So, these more general observations and concepts are shown to exist precisely when specific contexts and conditions are taken account of.

Insights from each study can be transferred to other sites where similar conditions exist. For example, in the case study on heterogeneity in community classes (case study two) the detailed use of the first language by Tamil students in the classroom showed how it was used as a learning tool and the classroom conditions which allowed this to happen. An understanding of learners' strategic use of other languages under these conditions can inform and perhaps transform any ESOL class with a broadly similar profile.

Case studies are more than descriptions or apt illustrations. They are selected and described in all their specificity in order to understand the *theoretical relationship* between the events and not just the events themselves. For example, in case study two, the theoretical notion of repair in managing social relations in talk derives from several conversations in class where the teacher and learners try to correct a grammatical error.

Mitchell's argument is based on analytic induction whereby all the data are looked at until patterns begin to emerge. The search for phenomena which do not fit the pattern i.e. disconfirming evidence helps to make the pattern richer and more complex. Once all the data have been accounted for in the pattern, then it is possible to say: 'If all these circumstances pertain then we can generalise from this pattern.' A more practitioner way of describing this process is the concept of 'fit'. If the case study gives enough context, i.e. describes all the conditions under which this pattern emerges, then readers can decide whether this case study fits the situations which they are familiar with.

Ethnographic and micro-ethnographic methods were used, similar to those in the *Adult Learners' Lives* project, including participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, audio and video recording of classrooms and photographs. Ethnography uses observation, sometimes participant observation and in-depth interviewing, over a sustained period of time, to understand other people's worlds from their perspective. Micro-ethnography combines this understanding with detailed discourse analysis. This multi-method collaborative approach meant that good relationships were developed with teachers and students. Such relationships are crucial to the quality and truthfulness of the research.

Since the learners and some of the teachers were from linguistically and culturally diverse

backgrounds, it was important to use modes of researching which were sensitive to diversity. Ethnographic interviewing is designed to elicit participants' own way of speaking rather than imposing researchers' categories and language on them. Where possible and desirable, interviews were carried out in the participants' own language and, where English was used, this was done with care in order to allow as much learner voice and meaning as possible. In this way, the interview data are of the informants' world constructed in their language. Interpreters were used to interview some learners and to translate uses of L1 in the classroom. We have learnt from this study the importance of training interpreters in appropriate methodology and this will inform future research with ESOL learners.

Ethnographic approaches are particularly suited to practitioner orientated research (Bloor 1997) since practitioners bring in a wealth of knowledge and experience and so are able to make considered analysis of actual instances of phenomena and the rich descriptions of classrooms and learners' lives. Teacher- researchers were involved in three of the projects but an ethnographic approach blurs the distinction between researching *on* and researching *with*. Since some of the research instruments, analysis and writing of case studies were worked on collaboratively with participants, it could be argued that all the teachers and many of the learners in the case studies were co-researchers.

In order to ensure that the case studies were not developed in isolation, the team agreed a number of common themes:

- Focus on the detail of classroom life.
- Focus on the relationship between classroom practices and learner perceptions.
- Acknowledgement of the linguistic and cultural complexity of classrooms.
- Acknowledgement of the resources learners bring, some of which will be different from mainstream learners.
- Acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of ESOL classes.
- Consideration of the role and impact of the National ESOL curriculum on classrooms and teachers.
- Interest in culturally and linguistically appropriate and sensitive methods of data collection.
- Practical relevance: particularly in terms of training resources for ESOL teachers.

The case study team also met on several occasions to discuss methods and to read and discuss each other's early drafts. In this way, concepts and insights from one case study helped to illuminate emerging ideas and findings from others.

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## Case study one - Asylum issues

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**“This is not enough for one’s life”: perceptions of living and learning English in Blackburn by students seeking asylum and refugee status.**

“This is not enough for one’s life – right? People need more.”

**Rachel Hodge and Kathy Pitt with David Barton (Lancaster University)**

### Introduction

This study arose out of the concerns of ESOL teachers at Blackburn College who have been raising issues around the particular needs of students seeking asylum and the role of educational provision in providing support since the initiation of the government dispersal policy in 2001.

#### Research questions

- To investigate the notion of needs. What are learners’ perceptions of their needs and how are those needs considered in the learning environment?
- To explore the impact of social issues on learning and the role of educational provision in orientation and pastoral support.
- To address some significant research methodological issues around working with this group, such as translation and interpretation.

We are focusing specifically on question B which explores the relationship between language learning needs and broader social needs. Research related to the needs of those seeking asylum and refugee status has recently been carried out by the National ESOL Training and Development Project (DFES 2003). This study contributes to the field with an in-depth ethnographic account of the expressed needs of students in one learning group. This reveals a pattern of interconnected needs, largely unaddressed, which have an impact on students’ ability to realise their potential for learning English and integrate into society. The study provides detailed evidence of the gaps in learning and social provision that need to be addressed at classroom, college, local and national levels.

#### Context

The study was carried out between January and July 2003 with students attending ESOL classes at Blackburn College in Entry Level 1 (E1) (beginner) level of the National Curriculum. Most of the students are young – between the ages of 18 and 25 years. E1 students attend a ‘fast track’ programme of 15 hours per week. They undergo regular target setting, reviews and assessments and progress to a higher level when they have passed assignments for the level they are in. Students seeking asylum and refugee status currently make up the majority of the ESOL student body and in both E1 and the other levels they come from a wide range of countries. Most E1 students have completed secondary education and several have gone on into higher education in their own countries. These students typically arrive in Dover and a few days later are transferred to Blackburn, a designated area under the recent government

dispersal policy. According to the local Asylum Team Support leader they are given housing, help to register with a doctor, help to register their children in school and information about where they can learn English. Apart from that, according to the students, there seems to be little other social or pastoral support.

### Methodology

The study takes a qualitative/ethnographic, multi-method, collaborative approach. Rachel was working closely with the E1 ESOL teacher (Wendy) and students. These relationships were crucial to the integrity and validity of the research. It takes time to get to know people and build up trust enough for the students to talk openly about their lives and experiences. Rachel and Kathy consulted regularly on all aspects of the study, carried out collaborative analysis and are co-writers of this report.

### Research activities

Detailed field notes from preliminary observations of five ESOL classes (researcher as participant observer).

Audio recordings and field notes from two consecutive classes (researcher as observer) and teacher reflections.

Photocopied learning materials from all observed classes.

Preliminary mini-interviews with all E1 students (English language).

Main interviews with seven E1 students (three dominant standard language, four English language – according to student choice) and the E1 teacher – all audio-recorded.

Photographs and students writing from a photography project (students as researchers - documenting feelings about living in Blackburn).

Audio-recording and field notes of photography project feedback.

Notes from regular meetings and informal conversations with E1 teacher, plus her written reflections on the two recorded classes.

### Snapshots of E1 class

We would like to give a glimpse of the 'ambience' and 'spirit' and 'voice' of these learners related to their learning experience and social realities and the resources they bring into their learning environment. We draw on field notes from classes Rachel was involved in as a participant observer. The issues these snapshots highlight will be discussed in the analysis section.

#### 27 January

*I visit the class for the first time. The students introduce themselves to me: Lisette, Congo; Paula, Colombia; Joelle, Rwanda; Yan Yan, Hong Kong; Amina, Bangladesh (females). Mohammed, Afghanistan; Saeed, Pakistan; Omar, Iraq; Ahmed, Iraq; Faisullah, Afghanistan; Ferdinand, Angola; and Cristof, Angola (males). Yan Yan and Amina have been here for 7/10 years but the others have been here for no more than a*

year. Most of these are still seeking asylum but Ferdinand and Mohammed now have leave to remain for four years.

**\* The above names with the exception of 'Faisullah' are pseudonyms.**

10.50a.m. break. I ask Wendy (W) (the teacher) if they go to the canteen. She says none of them go as they can't afford a drink as it's 50 pence. She says it's terrible because there's no common room and they just have to hang around on the stairs or outside.

### 28 January

Amina arrives. for the IT class

Saeed to Wendy: Amina know my language

Wendy: ok Amina can sit with you

There is a buzz, and a very good learning atmosphere. The task is very demanding but achievable with lots of support. This is given not only by Wendy and me but by students to each other spontaneously ...

### 6 February

Lisette has gone to London to see her solicitor

Paula has not arrived as she had an early doctor's appointment.

Ferdinand comes. He sits down and he says smiling "today is my birthday"! He tells us that Paula phoned him at 7a.m. and sang happy birthday to him down the phone

Mohammed says Faisullah has gone to ... find the police station

Wendy: but it's miles and miles away – he'll have to get a bus

Mohammed: he ask someone ... someone know

Ahmed: (to Rachel) every week he has to sign ... no visa

Wendy: (to Rachel) they've just moved the police station from the town centre to miles outside town, it's stupid

### Break time

Paula gives Ferdinand a birthday present and kisses him

Ferdinand: gracias!

### 7 February

On this day the students were feeling down, perhaps because it was Friday (Wendy said). The students look bored (which I have never seen before) though most of them are stretched by the exercises except Ahmed who gets them right immediately. He looks very 'down' today, not at all his usual bright, humorous self. [He is in hiding and was eventually deported]. Nearly half the students are missing [Joelle, Lisette, Cristof,

*Mohammed, and Paula) which seems to affect the class. Wendy told me later that every student had called her to say why they couldn't come [mainly medical and legal support reasons]*

### 19 February

*Paula and Yan Yan are joking together*

*Omar is the one who most often asks Wendy for help. He always seems very very eager to learn everything possible..*

*Cristof continues to look very gloomy and sad*

*Mohammed and Faisullah continue to use the Farsi dictionary and speak Farsi from time to time.*

*Cristof works alone*

*Ahmed mainly works alone but there are times when Omar asks him to explain things in Kurdish*

*Joelle still looks very 'far away'. I have never seen her like this before*

*Wendy to Joelle: are you alright today Joelle? Still not very well are you*

*I notice that Yan Yan is writing Cantonese in Chinese script*

*Rachel to Yan Yan: Your writing is beautiful – like a picture*

*Paula to Yan Yan: mmmmm I want to learn*

*Yan Yan: it's very difficult*

*Yan Yan writes in larger script 'I love you' and 'baby' for Paula who asked her to.*

### **What is everyday life like for a new student seeking asylum? Faisullah's story**

Students revealed a picture of what everyday life and learning was like for them in Blackburn both through our conversations in interviews and through their explanations of photographs they took to signify their feelings about living in Blackburn. We start with Faisullah's story. His experiences, many of which are common to other E1 students, provides us with a picture of what life is like for a person seeking asylum recently arrived in Blackburn and learning English.

#### **Coming to Blackburn**

Faisullah is 19 years old and from Afghanistan. He arrives in Dover after a long, dangerous and traumatic journey from Iran. He says that his first feelings were of relief and happiness to have finally arrived in a safe place where he could stay. He is treated kindly by immigration and his immediate needs for food and shelter are taken care of. He has no sense of where he would like to go and no choice. "They was nice ... I didn't know about Blackburn, they send

*me. I didn't know about no place ...* "He, like the other students were all sent to Blackburn in line with government dispersal policy. On arrival in Blackburn he is given good accommodation and his immediate needs for health registration, benefits and college registration are taken care of. He feels positive and well motivated to build a new life for himself and the first thing he wants to do is learn English so that he can integrate into society and especially get work, become independent and feel a purpose in his life. But, as he explains, there are hurdles to face, *"I want from Home Office they give me a paper I can work. After English, become ok, I want to do some job.. but I can't work. I want to make me busy."*

He brings with him a wealth of life experience – a strong family and community background, ability to face and overcome adversity, training as a stone mason and builder to mention some. He also brings with him a deep feeling of insecurity, the mental and emotional scars of torture and trauma he experienced in his own country and real fears about the wellbeing of his family and about his own future, which is constantly on his mind. *"I don't like the disco, just when I go to disco, and then I forget everything ... about future, about my family ..."*

### Everyday life

Though he is well motivated, everyday life is not easy for him. His main goal is to learn English and the daily English classes are a lifeline to him bringing structure to his week. *"When I come in the college in the morning, it make me happy ... because I meet some friends ... and we learn some English."* He takes initiative himself and has his own strategies for learning, as Wendy explains: *"Faisullah learns from everything – all stimuli. He learns a lot on his own he listens in the street, to the radio, TV. He asks about what he has heard and he reads a lot on his own; news on the internet, newspapers, magazines. He has a very good ear."* (Rachel Hodge's field notes, 1 July 2003)

One of his main problems seems to be that, although he wants to, he has little opportunity to speak English outside the class and this links to another problem which is having nothing to do. There were no welcome activities and there are no social activities arranged by the college or by others. A major stumbling block for him and the other students is living with emotional difficulties such as boredom, loneliness and worry. *"Now I went home I feel sad, then I come out, I walking around ... yes, boring, especially at night."* Faisullah gets support from classmates in the learning group but his close friend and housemate is often away in London. Omar, a classmate, describes the boredom and lack of purpose that he says he and Faisullah feel *"like me he go home then go to town centre and hang around nothing to do then go home then boring then again going to walk around towncentre..nothing to do."* Faisullah says he feels edgy and insecure walking around town. *"I went to town, I see some lads, I don't look ... I don't like group when talking loud"*. Another major worry for Faisullah and the other students is related to their status and their desire to get leave to remain in Britain. Wendy told me *"It doesn't help that he seems to have less status than the others even and has to sign in at the police station every two weeks. He can't stay out of Blackburn for more than five days at a time."* Faisullah, like many others, took photos of himself in his room reading letters from the Home Office and described himself thinking a lot and worrying in his bedroom (see appendix A ). He talks regularly to his London-based lawyer by phone through an interpreter but has to pay for the telephone calls himself. (Most of the students do not have interpreters and have to make frequent visits to London and/or get friends or their teacher to help them.) Wendy explains how these pressures have affected Faisullah's life and learning English:

*He has had periods of serious depression and paranoia. He is quite convinced that his repatriation to Afghanistan is imminent and he's terrified as his family have already*



*fled to Iran and are living as illegal immigrants there. After the Christmas holidays he went backwards in his language development and the drugs he was taking for sleeplessness made it impossible for him to concentrate. He was constantly tired and lost the ground he made. He needed a lot of support at that time and it really affected his health. He sometimes used to panic and go home in the middle of lessons. I rang him and talked to him and me and Mohammed (an Afghan classmate) finally convinced him to come and he snapped out of it. He almost had a relapse when a lot of Afghans were being repatriated but he got over that and is now blossoming. He's very sensitive and artistic a skilled craftsman a stonemason. We once had a lesson about favourite places and he described his favourite place where those huge Buddhist statues were that the Taliban destroyed and he said it made him feel really sad. He wants to get into the building trade eventually. (Rachel Hodge's field notes, 1 July 2003)*

## Analysis

This analysis focuses mainly on the students' own perceptions of living and learning English in Blackburn and on the interplay between the social issues they face as students seeking asylum and learning English. Faisullah's story is not unusual. Analysis of both his and other students' stories seemed to highlight the notion of 'needs'. Therefore we have tried to analyse i. what students say about their needs, ii. how students' expressed needs are being met, iii. constraints students face in meeting their needs, iv. the role of the ESOL class in meeting students needs and, v. wider institutional support.

### i. What do students reveal about their needs?

We found there are three strong categories of need:

#### *Need for more independence and control*

Another aspect of the traumatic experiences of these students is the lack of control over their past lives, that led to them becoming asylum seekers, or that results from the condition of being a seeker of asylum or a refugee.

*Ferdinand: The fact is that you need and it's not possible, and you can't stay like this, you need to get something to make – to earn your own living, because expecting others to give it to you ... that's not good*

*Lisette: They asked us to make choices. Well, since we don't know the place, how can you choose? I don't know. They sent us up there*

#### *Need for integration*

All the recently arrived students focused on in this study had been sent to Blackburn because of the government dispersal policy and their preferences, e.g. to join family members in other towns were not taken account of. They all needed opportunities to meet and make friends, speak with native English speakers and for ESOL provision as they had very little fluency in English. All of them expressed a desire to integrate into the communities they were now living in and to find work and saw the urgent need to learn English to do this:

*Cristof: Because without English you can't do anything, how are you going to integrate into the society?*

Mohammed: *My idea is learn good English and I can find job and study as well*

#### *Need for emotional support*

In addition, although not all wanted to talk about their lives before coming to England, it is clear that many have been through traumatic experiences and needed support with emotional and health issues:

Lisette: *There were problems in my country, so, so with that, that caused me some problems, yes. With the troubles there are in my country*

Cristof: *My mind isn't very good to play football ... (there are) some thoughts in my mind*

Joelle: *When I am here ..... never think about somebody can come to kick, to kill me*

#### **ii. How are students' expressed needs being met?**

##### *Self motivation and individual agency*

The lack of control and uncertainty, which all these students experience, makes them feel insecure physically, mentally and emotionally, and creates a fierce desire for some structure and 'settledness' in their lives. Despite the insecurity they are feeling they all demonstrate a strong motivation to integrate and learn English in order to be able to move towards independence. It is also important to note that the social and language learning needs of these students are not static and are always changing as people make efforts to become more integrated in society. The students were very positive, seizing on every opportunity to act and take initiative where they could, despite their present and past restrictions:

Cristof: *My life is here, I want to build my life here. Where else can I go?*

Mohammed: *Last week I found job ... part time job ... cleaning a bakery*

Joelle: *Yes I work in volunteer bureau and I ask ... so now I work in a office theatre*

##### *Self motivation to learn English*

One of the most striking characteristics of this particular group of learners is their enthusiastic and dedicated approach to the learning of English. Their attendance at the daily three- hour classes was very high and they worked hard both in and out of the class. Here are some of the comments of their teacher Wendy:

*They've been very, very motivated ... eager to learn and want to fit in*

*They're just so responsive to everything --they bring so much to the lesson*

##### *Students' Informal learning strategies*

In their interviews we asked them to talk about their learning strategies:

Ferdinand: *[TV] helps a lot ... the more I watch ... and sometimes the coin drops, many times something that wasn't clear in the lesson, you saw that word but it wasn't clear, then you hear the word again on TV and then you understand the meaning*

Cristof: *I speak a lot outside the course with some Pakistani friends*

Lisette: *I make an effort to read English, to know ... sometimes I go to Darwen library*

*Informal networks/shared linguistic backgrounds*

The positive effort students make to build up informal networks is crucial. This meets their needs for friendship, for emotional support and for social activities with mainly people who share their own linguistic/cultural background but also for developing wider friendship networks including ESOL classmates. Lisette from Rwanda, when asked what helped her get used to life in Blackburn, replied:

*If we see friends I have the time to talk, to tell them things, we tell each other things*

She named these friends as Congolese, Rwandan, Tanzanian. Ferdinand told the class about his need, at times, to be with a friend from the same background:

Ferdinand: *Sometimes I'm sit my home, there no place to go, I think oh I have my friend, yeah I go to my friend, I talk to him - ... -my friend is same my country I talk to everything of my country*

This support can help these beginner learners of English through the difficulties of settling into a new location and language but it is not always available away from the big cities. Paula experienced severe relationship problems in her first few months and needed medical support for depression for both herself and her young son. At that time she did not know of any Spanish speakers in Blackburn and felt isolated:

Paula: *But they [Spanish speakers] coming a few months ago. But before we, just, we, Latin people here. Anybody [nobody] speak Spanish. We don't speak English*

As well as providing emotional support these friendships and contacts with people from shared linguistic backgrounds are also important to help them survive officialdom, negotiate the minefields of seeking leave to remain and get to know what facilities they can access in Blackburn:

Cristof: *I met her [a Brazilian woman who sometimes interprets for Portuguese speakers] through another Angolan guy that was already living here when I arrived*

Lisette: *As she [a Rwandan housemate] came before me, it's her who told me that there was, it was necessary to register at the college. Because we were told, she came to show me, and I registered, yes*

It was clear that these students showed a common spirit of support for each other as classmates both inside and outside the ESOL class, even though individuals from the same country did not necessarily have enough in common to form intimate friendships.

Church communities seem to be the only social organisation which is providing opportunity for some of these learners to meet and socialise with local people. Four learners, who come from church backgrounds in their own countries, specifically talk about attending different churches through friends and sometimes being given support to attend:

Lisette: *Sometimes they come to pick me up from the house, as well, to go [to church], I don't have transport, sometimes*

Church attendance may be enabling some students to address their spiritual needs, but it also provides informal learning and social opportunities and a chance for their voice to be heard:

*Ferdinand: there we have the opportunity to exchange opinions, at the church it's very good because we have there a youth group that gives you the opportunity*

There do not appear to be these kind of opportunities available for the others who do not attend churches.

#### *Material needs*

On arriving in Blackburn the immediate needs of these students for housing, basic living and practical orientation were perceived to have been met overall by the students:

*Cristof: It has everything that you can have in a house ... they support us*

*Mohammed: You can go ask for house if you need any furniture for house, if you need any help for your money, they help you, they tell you post office*

As we shall see, these houses become both places of refuge, but also withdrawal as the students attempt to cope with their new lives. Most students said they had enough money to survive but not to live fulfilling lives:

*Ferdinand: but this is not enough for one's life, right? People need more [talking about money, the need to learn English and to find work]*

#### **iii. Constraints students face in meeting their needs**

Although students' basic material needs were met, we found inter-agency support for their mental health and social and legal support needs as they arrived in Blackburn was insufficient. Faisullah's experience and difficulties outlined in section 3 are shared by the other students and illustrate how these issues impact on their learning.

*Faisullah: I cannot think about anything. I cannot learn English, I am always thinking, thinking*

#### *Mental stress/lack of appropriate counselling*

As we have illustrated, students have gone through traumatic experiences, and most were living in constant anxiety about their families back in the countries they had left, about their applications for asylum and refugee status and their future prospects:

*Lisette looked utterly devastated "I have just been refused to remain in Britain"*

*Ferdinand: I am back home I am very tired, and go bed, I think for my life, you know ... I think of everything for my life, I think of father, my mother, my brother and everything because long time I don't see..*

*Paula: But I really worry about my family, they live in Israel very poorly – my sister now a little better but my mom*

*Rachel: What sort of things do you want to forget?*

Faisullah: *About future, about my family*

During her observation of the classes, Rachel noted that many of the students suffered strong mood swings. Cristof, a former boy soldier in Angola, showed signs of severe mental trauma as she noted the first time she met him in class:

*Wendy said that when visitors have come previously he has stared them out for quite a long time and has pretended he cannot read and write. I am glad she has told me this because Cristof takes one look at me, stops dead in his tracks frozen to the spot just inside the door and gives me a very long hostile stare and his body seems very tense and quivering. He looks very fearful and very wary and very ready to take some action if necessary (Rachel Hodge's field notes, 28 January 2003)*

Although Cristof and the other students are helped by the ESOL teacher and their friends to cope with these stresses, there is no counselling support which would support them and assist the ESOL teacher to meet their needs.

Others, like Joelle and Faisullah who also are struggling with depression, are limited to advice and medication from the GP which is insufficient in dealing with their problems. Wendy had advised Faisullah to seek counselling but he felt this would be useless unless the counsellor could speak his language and understand his cultural background and experience.

*Gender and ethnicity*

Gender, ethnicity and family status play a role in both access to services, friendship and language learning. Paula is the only South American student in the group and the only student to have achieved any kind of integration with the local community, partly through her young children and partly through her relationship with a local resident. Her case echoes that of Eva in Bonnie Norton's research with recently arrived ESOL students in Canada (Norton and Toohey 2001).

*It's a friend. He help me a lot. English friend, for the home and to communication with me*

On her arrival in Blackburn, Paula went through a lot of difficulties with her then partner, who eventually left her and her children:

*I had problems, big problems with myself, with depression, with all my life*

Her spoken English is noticeably more fluent than that of her classmates. Paula has managed to access appropriate support for her own and her son's mental problems through her health visitor referring her to the women's centre and a family therapy group at the local hospital. Wendy pointed out that lots of people want to help Paula as she is young, female, pretty and white. For most of them, especially for black males, integration is much more problematic (see 'racism' overleaf).

*Loneliness, boredom and lack of social activities*

There is no systematic or formal support for these students to integrate into local communities, nor are they given access to any kind of activity set up to meet their social needs. All the students talked of not having anything to do after their ESOL class and during college holidays:

Ferdinand: *We wake up in the morning and we don't know where to go, sometimes we spend the whole day at home*

Cristof: *There is nothing for the time being, we can't do anything*

Rachel: *Do you go out in the evenings?*

Faisullah: *Once a week maybe to discotheque ... I don't like the disco, just when I go to disco, and then I forget everything*

### *Racism*

This lack of any social provision reinforces their sense of isolation, a situation that is compounded by the fact that Blackburn is a town which has not previously experienced a diverse mix of peoples, even though a large proportion of its population is of South Asian heritage. The African students in particular have experienced racism:

Lisette: *There was one day, I was on the telephone in the phone box, I saw English people, they saw me and they started to say "BLACK, BLACK"*

Ferdinand: *Black people have started coming here very recently ... we walked in the streets and they looked at us in a way that we didn't know what to say ... everybody looked, they were scared*

*Sometimes you didn't feel like going out in the streets ... because when you just think that you will go out and people will look at you*

As we can see from the last quote from Ferdinand, this negative attention sometimes leads these students to withdraw. This withdrawal, resulting from both a lack of opportunity for social activities and from racist reactions, serves to increase their anxieties and insecurity.

### *Lack of legal and language support*

None of these students receive any support in Blackburn for the legal processes they have to go through. Joelle has recently moved from a solicitor in London to one in nearby Burnley. All the others have solicitors in either London or Dover and have to manage their affairs through phone calls and occasional bus trips for appointments to see them. Although one student has access to an interpreter, there is no systematic language support, either:

Ferdinand: *If you are lucky to find an interpreter, but I didn't have this luck here with my lawyer, I had to take someone with me who could speak English*

More seriously, a member of the council Asylum Support Team told me about the case (and he said there are others) of an Angolan man who had been the victim of an unprovoked attack not having his case pursued by the police due to the lack of availability and expense of interpreting services. As part of the research, students put together documents they had received from the Home Office and solicitors. These show that even many native speakers would have difficulty in understanding these important documents. Lisette had to ask Wendy to explain what the questions meant on a questionnaire sent by the solicitor (see appendix A). Obligations to phone, answer letters from the Home Office, pick up vouchers, sign at the police station and go and travel to see their solicitors are the main reasons, apart from ill health, that the students' attendance in class is interrupted. In addition, they often turn to the

teacher, Wendy, for help to make a phone call or discuss a letter, as she is the only support they have:

*Mohammed: She is very kind. If you ask any help, if you tell her I have to ring somebody I don't understand how to speak, she help you.*

Wendy told me that the students were seriously disadvantaged in relation to dealing with accessing health and dental services and in explaining their needs with no access to interpreters:

*Wendy: I am constantly on the phone to dentists, doctors and hospitals to help them to get appointments and help to explain medical problems. The NHS dentist helpline is designed for native speakers and it's impossible for the students to get the services they need without some support*

#### **iv. The role of the ESOL class in meeting students' needs**

Because of the constraints these students face, the three-hour daily language class is not only a vital learning environment but also an important social space which is enriched by the resources and life experience, informal support systems and desire to learn that these students and their teacher bring to it:

##### *Classroom culture*

In this section we look at some of the elements that contribute towards this positive classroom culture and the overwhelmingly positive response by students related to their class, course and their teacher. The class culture, which could be described as teacher-centred, language task oriented and well structured, with strong protocols for politeness, punctuality and attendance is underpinned by a strong teacher empathy for both the social and learning needs of these students. Wendy has set up the daily class as a tightly structured one in which she steers the students between whole class, group and pair work. She explained her reasons for this teacher-centred approach as responding to the students' initial needs for security and stability:

*I have been right school-marmish in a lot of ways, and trying to get that structure into it, and I think they've needed that, especially in the early days – things could have collapsed and ... they could have drifted*

But alongside this tight control she has also always responded to each student as an adult and has tried to support them in their efforts to settle into their new lives. At any time one or more of the students may be visibly struggling with their physical and mental health:

*Lisette is leaning right over on her arm on the desk ... looks very tired*

*I ask Wendy at break if Joelle is alright and Wendy says Joelle has been like this (thinks perhaps not been well) all week*

*Faisullah looks ill and depressed. Wendy has been very concerned about Faisullah's mental state and depression*

*Wendy: They know the boundaries and the rules, what I expect of them and yet being their friend ... and being there for them as well and its maintaining that balance. At the*

*end of the lesson there's always something to deal with, and even at other times, coming to the staff room to ask for this done or that done*

#### *Keeping 'the outside' outside the learning space*

In order to support these vulnerable students and to aid their learning, Wendy has developed the practice of attending to their requests for help, such as phoning lawyers, outside class time, and of not making their past or present lives a part of any of the classroom learning activities. Her reason for this practice is to create a separate space inside the classroom as she explained in her interview:

*So if they've got problems we try and deal with them at other times ... the classroom time is lesson time, and that is the time when they can be just a student and switch off*

Within this space she helps the students focus on their drive to learn the dominant language within a secure atmosphere of mutual support, where both she and they can put the complex and often negative demands on them to one side, as she explains:

*Within the classroom we've got a very definite focus, and, in that time they can forget everything else, but also I can as well be just a teacher for a little while*

Every one of the students expressed, like Mohammed below, their positive response to Wendy as a teacher:

*Wendy she's a very good teacher and I very, I am very happy, uh, in this class*

In this way the teacher too finds a way to deal with the inevitable pressures and emotional stresses of supporting the learning and social needs of these students. So, for the first months of this class the students engage in tasks that have little reference to the rest of their lives, and Wendy approaches themes such as 'family' with extreme caution, knowing that this is a very painful subject for those students who have lost contact with theirs, or who fear for their safety. This approach has obviously been a successful one as the students get to know and trust each other and become familiar with the daily routines of the class. In addition, she has drawn on students, willingness and initiatives to support each other both outside and inside the class. Wendy actively encourages the students to look to their peers for learning support rather than setting herself up as the sole language expert in the class:

*right, you can help each other, you don't have to work on your own, you can help each other with your meanings. Who can help Joelle?*

#### *Peer friendship and learning support*

It seems that there is a strong culture of friendship and learning support in this group. Most students meet classmates outside the class both for social and learning activities, such as doing homework together.

Rachel: *OK. And what about people in the class? Are they your friends?*

Mohammed: *They wasn't my friend, but now they are*

Rachel: *Ahh, that's nice, yes*



Mohammed: *Nice group yes*

Rachel: *Yes, it is*

Mohammed: *Nice teacher as well*

There are many examples of students supporting each other in class as this extract shows:

Wendy to Amina: *did you forget? [to bring her photos to class] Never mind, you can share with the others, with the other people, okay*

Mohammed: *I give you one*

Amina: *Will you?*

#### *Students using their linguistic resources*

Part of this peer support for learning that is an integral feature of this classroom culture is the way Wendy allows the students freedom to use their linguistic resources which go beyond just using their L1. The students often help each other's and their own learning of English through the medium of their shared knowledge of other languages. The following description from Rachel's field notes of one particular activity using dictionaries illustrates this:

*Saeed asks Mohammed for some help – they speak in Farsi though Saeed's first language is Urdu*

*Ferdinand writes Portuguese translation next to each word as he looks each one up in the English dictionary*

*Mohammed uses both Farsi and English dictionaries and both he and Faisullah write the Farsi word next to the English. Lisette writes English language definitions from the dictionaries next to each word*

*Saeed writes Urdu next to words*

*Joelle writes English language definitions from the dictionary*

*Omar writes Kurdish words and Kurdish definitions but is using an English dictionary*

Again, this practice is facilitated by the teacher. Wendy encourages Omar to sit with Ahmed who shares his own language (Kurdish). Although the classroom space is sometimes a multilingual one, the over-riding motivation these students have to learn English is ever-present:

*Omar [the new student] and Ahmed are speaking to each other in their own language. Lisette [playfully] shakes her finger at Ahmed ... and says "you don't speak your own language in the class" Ahmed: "I explain him – it his first time in class." The two Iraqi students continue to chat in their own language occasionally but this does not seem to interfere with their concentration*

They use their linguistic resources as one way to work towards this learning goal and it is only

one of their learning strategies. They also use *English* to help each other:

Lisette: *I can't understand [looking at a picture of people socialising]*

Cristof: *the girl, Nancy ... girl's boring*

[Paula explaining 'far away' to Joelle] – *Paula points to herself "you near me", then points to Lisette, "Lisette far away"*

#### *Humour*

Another resource that the students bring to this learning environment is humour. This humour often takes place in activities such as mechanical drills to practice particular grammatical structures. Although the students undertake these activities with the same amount of enthusiasm as all the other learning tasks, they make the mechanical, repetitive task meaningful to themselves and more enjoyable through play:

*Ahmed jokes with Joelle as they practise a can/can't drill –*

Ahmed: *can you make cakes?*

Joelle: *yes I can* [expected construction]

Ahmed: *you are making good cakes or bad cakes?!* [spontaneous response]

*Lisette is describing one of the students and the others have to guess who it is in an activity designed to consolidate knowledge of new vocabulary*

Lisette: *he's tall and well built*

Ahmed: *nobody in classroom!*

Wendy picks this up and extends it: *somebody must have walked past!*

#### *Class as haven*

Wendy joins in and contributes to this language play, thus acknowledging it as part of the learning/social discourse which clearly contributes to the positive and supportive atmosphere which Wendy is trying to create:

*There's been a really happy atmosphere in the classroom, and the classroom has been, I think, a little bit of a haven for them*

Wendy is helping to create a space for these students of security and social interaction which is a refuge from some of the realities of their lives outside the classroom walls. This is ironic since as refugees, this place [Blackburn], outside the classroom walls is supposed to be a refuge from the unstable and uncertain environments they have fled from.

The space to use spontaneous humour and language play not only enables the students to make the language they are learning their own, but it also helps them cope with the stresses of their precarious lives.

*Bringing the outside in*

As we have shown, there are many ways that Wendy encourages the students to make the classroom space their own, through their linguistic resources, their support for each other and their language play. Also, in the classes that were observed, it was noted that some students did bring their outside worlds into some of the individual tasks. For example, Paula when asked to write some sentences to practice the structure can/can't did not produce the expected 'drills' such as 'I can play tennis' or 'I can't drive' but wrote a sophisticated expression of her feelings at that time:

*I can't understand English people at all.*

*I can cry easily.*

*I can't leave England at the moment.*

*I can't forget my good friends.*

*I can't speak Chinese but I would like to learn.*

*I can meet with my friends but not with my family.*

Omar from Iraq, the first time he had ever used a computer also brought his own concerns into the learning activity, i.e. he brought the outside world into the classroom:

*I am amazed to see that he has produced ... a picture from clipart of a large ... chain. He says "I want to write 'I want independent' ... I explain ... that he needs the noun 'independence'. He corrects the spelling using the dictionary. His face is beaming ... I ask him "Why did you want to write that?" He says to me slowly and very clearly using hand gestures to help me understand "Iraq big house. One room. All people in one room. I want independence." ... [I am stunned and moved by what he has done with so little [computer] knowledge in order to express himself. (Rachel Hodge's field notes, 28 January 2003)*

A research activity around student photographs (see appendix B) showed that students responded to the opportunity to bring some of their life and experience into the class and use English to express themselves both orally and in writing (see appendices C and D). The students were given disposable cameras to take pictures of their choice, around the themes of what made them angry, happy, sad, etc. about living in Blackburn. The students evident interest in this activity led Wendy to ask them to talk about their photos in class time in pairs and as a group, as a part of their language work. Wendy started the activity by showing some of her photos, and sharing her emotions with the class. For example, she showed them her photo of a homeless person:

*I felt very angry that in my town, in Blackburn, somebody had to sleep in the street — ... I was so angry that this could happen in a place where we are, we're quite rich really*

Here are some extracts from the students talking about their photos to the whole class (see appendix Ci):

*Joelle: Yeah, this hap time, yeah yeah, when I see this photograph I miss my country*

*because in my country there is many many places like this*

*Ferdinand: I am back home I am very tired, and go bed, I think for my life, you know ... I think of everything for my life, I think of father, my mother, my brother and everything because long time I don't see my mother or father ... 25 years I not see my mother, yeah ...*

*Mohammed: your parents are still alive?*

*Ferdinand: I don't know ... I don't know, maybe they dead, maybe they alive, don't know*

*Omar: I listen to this man [a busker], I am very sad, because I, I, I far away from my country, Kurdistan, and far away my family*

Clearly these students have chosen to share their lives, cultures and pain with the class as a whole and feel safe and comfortable enough to do this, which affirms the approach Wendy has taken with this class. The activity allowed both Wendy and the students to engage in 'real communication' using English language.

The value of creating spaces for students to talk about their lives relates directly to their language learning. Learning another language is partly about taking on a new voice, a new set of identities. However, it is also about making the new language real and meaningful to yourself and your life. Throughout the research process these students could be seen to be struggling to make their own meanings through this new language and communicate with others. At the end of this photography session Wendy said to the class:

*Today I heard Ferdinand speak more than ever before in this class. Usually he's really quiet, isn't he? But today he had lots to say so I think it made some people talk that don't usually*

We would argue that once there is a feeling of trust within a class then classroom activities and materials should contain plenty of spaces like these in which students can, if they wish, bring their experiences and feelings into the class and the new language. Other ways of bringing outside 'worlds' into class could be explored so that students can gain cultural knowledge and information and at the same time use their English in real communicative encounters.

#### **v. Wider institutional support**

##### *Demand on ESOL teachers*

It is clear from the above analysis that these students have a range of social needs which impact on their learning. We can see that, apart from support they get from their informal networks, it is their teacher who is their main advocate and support. Wendy explains how this affects her:

*They've got all these different needs ... they don't have the support network ... they're more dependent on you ...*

*It does put a lot of strain on the rest of the ... my time*

*At the end of the lesson there's always something to deal with ... and even at other times*

A focus group discussion with ESOL teachers in the college, further identified the issues and particular social and learning demands that teachers face and suggests that teachers need more training, orientation and support to prepare them to cope with the situation:

*What's difficult for us is having to take on a pastoral role ... phoning up for things ... driving them to collect furniture. We don't know anything. We have no idea about funding processes, entitlements. We really need a specialist person in the college to help us deal with those things. (K. ESOL teacher)*

*Everybody is traumatised in some way or another. They have all left their families and communities. It's very difficult for us and very different from teaching people of South Asian heritage who live here in strong family and community networks ... so like many topics are taboo ... like family and anything to do with leisure and shopping cause it's all linked to spending money which they haven't got ... (J. ESOL teacher)*

#### *Teachers' suggestions for wider college support*

As we have seen, one of the main needs of these students is for social activities which will help them to speak English outside the class and to integrate. Both Wendy and other ESOL staff who Rachel talked to shared the frustration they feel and had some clear ideas about what the college could do to give much needed support to students and alleviate the pressure that ESOL teachers face:

*We (Access Foundation team) put a proposal for a common room and for a programme of social events but this all came to nothing.*

*Wendy: The other thing that I spoke to the Principal about ... was making links within the college ... like my students to have 'buddies' in other parts of the college ... for example people who are learning Portuguese ... to buddy up with one of our students who speaks Portuguese*

*Wendy: I've been pushing for this for a really, really long time [for a liaison person to focus on social needs and activities] ... finally the management have taken it on board*

*Wendy: Well really as an educational institution we've that role as well, don't we ...*

#### *Need for improved counselling services – college and outside agency*

Another important need revealed was for counselling related to learning progression and for exploring training and job opportunities which builds on students' existing skills and qualifications. There was a sense that, these students who have come with a wealth of educational and training from their own countries, were in a fog in terms of knowing what is on offer and how to map their learning journeys and that this is beyond the remit of the teachers to address. One teacher expressed what is a reality for many of the students:

*He had a really good job and earned a lot in his own country but here nobody knows that and I think he doesn't feel valued*

ESOL teachers said that they were working to develop the job seeking courses on offer so that they would better cater for ESOL learners.

Though it is early days for the EI students, it seems that they do need some counselling to

help them understand their options and map the road ahead. A long exchange with Joelle about her wish to be a doctor revealed a great deal of confusion about how she would go about working towards that goal. Faisullah also clearly needed some signposting and support:

*Yes, I want to get some job*

*Do you have any idea what kind of job? ...*

*I don't know*

*You don't know. What are your interests?*

*I don't know*

He went on to say he wanted to learn about building and he had asked Wendy about that.

Ferdinand like the others came with skills and had qualifications in mechanics, in tailoring and topography. He sees his goal as doing higher level training in mechanics or possibly tailoring so he can get a job. So far he has not talked to anyone about how to go about that.

The Access Foundation team has approached the college about interpreters for interviewing and counselling ESOL students but they have not yet had a response. The team also face difficulties with the delivery, partly due to college changing their policy and no longer providing free crèche places and travel expenses. These policy changes have come about because of new government policies related to public funds. Wendy said that Joelle and Lisette had told her they would not be able to attend college next year because their bus fares would not be covered.

One staff member described the fiasco of taking students to the Careers Guidance Office where the staff appeared not to have the necessary language and cultural awareness to communicate with them and pitch their counselling appropriately. Speaking loudly and slowly seemed to be their only strategy and they seemed to have little awareness of the students' limited cultural knowledge about the worlds of training, higher education and work. He feels that college Student Services should be taking this role but that they do not have sufficient training and understanding of the issues to counsel and support students seeking asylum.

#### *Lack of language support on other courses*

ESOL students are, in principle, able to join other courses across college like other ABE students. One staff member told me that although the college promotes this widening participation and offers *learning* support (e.g. mapping basic skills on to other courses), it does not currently offer the *language* support which ESOL learners need. This means that teachers on other courses are reluctant to take ESOL students such as those seeking asylum.

*[students] are currently being turned away by one of our [subject] areas because of their language difficulties*

#### *Implications of lack of wider local support*

Part of the reason that ESOL staff are spending time supporting students is due to the inefficiency of the Home Office systems of support. A senior member of the council Asylum Support Team interviewed told us of the constraints they are working under. They have had to

bear the brunt of ad hoc dispersal policy receiving, with very little preparation, around 800 people from many different countries within a two year period. He claims the reason there are long delays in processing appeals is because of a serious lack of co-ordination of activity between the Home Office and the National Asylum Support System causing serious implications for asylum seekers when they do not receive the necessary papers. Lisette, one of the E1 students, was left without any benefits for a period of four weeks when she was refused leave to remain and was preparing her appeal. She was forced to depend on other asylum seeker friends and ask Wendy to make phone calls to her lawyer. The team are not able to take a counselling approach and give the degree of support they would like to due to financial, time and language constraints and the pressure of local political opinion, partly fuelled by the active political presence of the British National Party (BNP) in the area. He said that more 'joined-up' thinking was needed with other related agencies, instead of uncoordinated, ad hoc individual effort, in order to educate the local community and provide more support to asylum seekers.

It is clear that the team are beginning to think of initiatives to respond to some social needs that the E1 students mentioned, such as holding occasional information/sharing forums (with translation services), but little else is happening yet, *"We are thinking of starting a befriending service"* *"We are also thinking about the possibility of providing some services for them such as drop-in centres"*.

## Lessons and implications

### Summary and discussion of analysis

We can see from the analysis a pattern emerging of interconnected needs which are common to all the students as well as the felt experience of uncertainty which pervades so much of their lives. These needs and underlying anxiety have an impact on their ability to realise their potential for learning English and to integrate into society. Despite initial relief and happiness at feeling safe and secure and the resources which students bring and develop such as their informal networks, there are some major constraints on and gaps in students' learning and social needs being met. Despite an obvious will to address issues related to the needs of asylum seekers, inter-agency effort appears to be still largely ineffective, particularly in relation to appropriate counselling and welcoming/social activities. We wish to stress that it is not our intention in any sense to 'pathologise' these students. Clearly needs do change, resources such as communicative skills and knowledge of local cultural 'ways of being' and different local cultural contexts develop in time and life can become easier and fuller in many ways. Initial analysis of data related to E3 students, who have typically lived here for longer than a year, seems to confirm this. Research with the E1 students was carried out at a 'particular moment in time' when most of them had been living in Britain for only a few months at the most. They were living 'in a particular place' and context very different to the bigger cities, in a town which had only recently been designated as an area for dispersal. The town was hardly prepared to receive people from a wide range of countries and linguistic backgrounds and an added constraint was that there were no established communities of the students' own linguistic/cultural background for them to join and gain support from.

These students have had their basic material needs met and show a fierce desire to learn English and integrate. They are making a good start learning English in a very supportive learning and social environment in the ESOL class which they and their teacher have created. Though the students are clearly very happy with the existing provision, the analysis of their

needs strongly illustrates that they would benefit from more opportunities to engage in learning tasks that are real communicative encounters, such as when they and the teacher talked about their photographs. Such activities and others which bring current everyday life and local cultural contexts into the class would enable the students to communicate real experiences and feelings, to gain cultural knowledge, information and advice and to bridge the gap between learning and using English. Learning activities should relate closely to student needs rather than be driven by centrally designed curricula and government targets. Despite their supportive learning environment the students are suffering from loneliness, depression and lack of appropriate expert counselling, lack of legal and language rights and information and have few opportunities to speak English outside the class and to integrate with members of the host community. Being black in a community that has a dominant white and large minority South Asian population seems to be particularly stressful.

The ESOL teacher appears to be their main advocate and often has to assume the additional unpaid and untrained role of social worker with little support. ESOL teachers cannot be expected to develop creative responses to the language needs of these students if their time is 'eaten into' giving other kinds of support in addition to the heavy demands placed upon them by new initiatives related to implementation of the *Skills for Life* strategy. The strategy also places demands on managers to reach targets, another thing which diverts time and energy from addressing student and teacher needs. The college and other agencies such as careers services are not adequately prepared or trained to respond holistically to the learning/social needs of this group of students and help them to build on their existing skills and experience. The experiences and perceptions of all these students seem to suggest that they are not just particular to Blackburn but may be a reality for other towns that come under the dispersal policy and which may not be properly prepared and trained to receive and respond to the needs of people/students who are seeking asylum from a wide range of countries. There is an urgent need for effective liaison between college and other agencies so that the skills and resources that these students bring in with them can be supported and used for the benefits of both the individuals and our society as a whole. This particular context provides a telling case for other places where similar conditions already exist or may develop in the future.

### **What do we mean by 'needs' and what is the relationship between 'needs' and good language learning?**

A traditional understanding of needs is that which underpins a 'needs analysis' approach commonly used in ESP and development work. 'Experts' use well-honed tools for finding out people's needs in clearly defined areas. Needs here are pre-defined by experts – categories of needs are presupposed by set approaches to analysis that depend on a predetermined set of questions. In needs analysis for language learners this is often closely linked to college and government agendas such as what they as providers can offer and what they think people need to learn in order to pass assessments which will attract further college funding or to job-see and join the workforce. A methodology is used which can compartmentalise and decontextualise needs by narrowly focusing on language learning needs and with a narrow view of language as grammar, lexis and socially appropriate language, with no reference to how other types of more social needs may interplay with these. This approach also suggests a decontextualised deficit view of people's 'needs' being problems that have to be sorted out rather than seeing these needs within the context of valuing what resources and skills people already have. It is a view which suggests people have to be told what their needs are by others and that the only way of addressing their needs is through the intervention of 'experts' as though people have no resources to draw on themselves.



In this case study we hold an alternative notion of needs and how best to identify needs. We did not start with questions about needs, rather people's needs emerged from a careful analysis of what people told us about their experiences of their everyday lives, living and learning English in Blackburn. The multi-method, collaborative approach we used ensured that our understanding of people's needs was in-depth and based on the differing perspectives of students, their teachers and others providing support and gained through a range of different events such as interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations, students' photography and class observations. Barton and Hamilton (1998) and Hodge and Jones (1996) discuss similar ethnographic approaches in more detail. The analysis clearly shows that the needs of this group of students were complex, some particular to them as people recently arrived and seeking asylum and some shared by other ESOL learners. What students told us showed clearly that needs related to language learning and achievement cannot be separated from needs related to the other dimensions of being human – our social, physical, emotional and cultural dimensions and also to their own individual and cultural resources. We learned from these students, as the analysis clearly shows, that it is meaningless to talk about needs without recognising the complexities of interwoven factors such as fluctuation and change and the degree of possibility and opportunities related to addressing needs.

Formal teaching based on a predetermined curriculum not only leaves out the everyday lives and social dimensions but also often fails to recognise what students are able to do for themselves to address their needs. Initiatives such as volunteering or self study or joining other organisations need support as part of ESOL provision. Auerbach, (1996), Fingeret (1983; Fingeret and Drennon (1997); Merrifield et al., (1996), Norton and Toohey (2001) are all ethnographers of literacy and learning who affirm this dimension of learning and who have carried out research with students who are refugees and asylum seekers.

*Tensions and turning points take place outside the educational context. They are rooted in adult life circumstances and personal characteristics ... the change process is supported by intensive continuing interaction by others both outside and inside the programme. (Fingeret and Drennon, 1997:75)*

All these ethnographers emphasise the need for a dual focus – on individual agency and social context/opportunities (see the review by Barton and Pitt, 2002 for a discussion of other ESOL related research). However, the idea of agency is not simple and if students are to be supported in addressing their own needs this has to be understood in relation to the different cultural resources and cultural capital which students have and which may require different types of responses from students themselves, from teachers and from other agencies in order to address needs. For example, though both Paula and Joelle are young, attractive and female, the fact that Paula is white with young children and Joelle is black in a white dominant society means that Joelle has less cultural capital and therefore needs even more and different support than Paula in order to be able to integrate into society. Norton and Toohey also argue that understanding these factors is essential to supporting students to realise their potential as learners:

*Understanding good language learning requires attention to social practices in the contexts in which individuals learn L2s. As well, we have argued for the importance of examining the ways in which learners exercise their agency in forming and reforming their identities in those contexts. We see this dual focus as necessary to understand good language learning (2001:318)*

Centralised teaching approaches can also underplay the level of anxiety, stress and uncertainty that act as a barrier to learning. A special course set up for traumatised refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden integrated language teaching with physical and mental health support and found that such learners need to be identified early to prevent drop out (Barton and Pitt 2000; Roden, 1999). The complexity and interwovenness of needs suggests that educationalists need to be working with other agencies in order that their students can realise their full potential as learners, such as linking students with befriending services run by volunteer bureaus or other voluntary organisations.

### Research issues

#### *i. Methodology*

Despite taking a collaborative, democratic approach, there are issues which are not easily resolved and would benefit from further discussion beyond the scope of this report. These include dealing with ‘multi-positioning’ of researchers as researcher, teacher and friend for example, power relations in the research encounter and the issue of withdrawing from research relationships. Researchers need to consider how all participants in the research process can be brought fully into the making of knowledge. There are other important ethical and linguistic issues linked to representation of student voice, especially those related to choice of language in research encounters, interpretation and translation. These will be discussed in more depth in a separate paper.

#### *ii. For further research*

- Looking at language learning provision which is related to job seeking and vocational courses for those given leave to remain.
- Exploring the literacy practices of ESOL students outside the classroom to understand better how formal teaching can support and draw on these.
- Follow the experiences of students who do volunteer work – to understand how this practice benefits language learning and social integration – what is the role of such informal practices?
- Looking at language support for ESOL learners on other courses. The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) will be addressing this issue in ‘The Embedded Skills Project’ that has just started.
- Gender differences in the experiences of recently arrived students seeking asylum, both inside and outside the class (as suggested by Elsa Auerbach in her feedback on this study).

### Recommendations

This is not just a ‘list’ – it is a passionate and urgent plea from the researchers and ESOL teachers for the government, colleges and other agencies to respond more fully and appropriately to the needs which students seeking asylum have expressed linked to learning English. These recommendations show that we have come to similar conclusions to those outlined in the DfES support materials for ESOL providers recently published (2003). This publication provides useful ideas and materials for addressing many of the issues related to the learning and social needs of students seeking asylum. The strength of our ethnographic study is that it provides in-depth, detailed evidence particularly related to the situation and needs of recently arrived students that have to be addressed urgently and are crucial for their survival and integration into this society. It shows that the existence of such support materials is not enough. ESOL providers urgently need to act on the guidance they provide.

#### At college level

- More social activities.
- Full-time liaison person (the right person – former asylum seeker?) to work with college Student Services, the ESOL team, the Careers Service, other agencies such as NGOs, volunteering etc. to share information and expertise.
- Providing awareness training for other local organisations on language/cultural issues.
- Need to consider language and literacy support (at all levels) on other courses within the college.
- Permanent common room space.
- Student social partnerships within college – based on shared language, leisure and culture interests.
- Lobbying the government to make public funds available to support travel and create expenses.
- Continue with the fast tracking full time for ESOL E1 and also Entry Level 2 (E2).
- Consider including workplace and Higher Education visits within ESOL provision.

#### At government level

- Consideration of the infrastructure needed to support the *holistic* needs of asylum seekers when they are dispersed to other centres.
- Infrastructure locally should include legal support, interpreters and appropriate counselling services.
- A much better programme to prepare local authorities and communities which are new dispersal centres.
- Address issues to do with access to public funds that will enable students to continue their language studies.

#### At local authority level

- Maximise efforts for effective 'joined-up' awareness-raising and support programmes drawing on existing community organisations and resources.

#### At practitioner level

- Bringing everyday life and local cultural contexts into the classroom where possible – visitors, materials.
- Holding special workshops for students seeking asylum on cultural/social topics relevant to them, e.g. the world of work.
- Creating space and strategies such as photography projects for the students to initiate topics which relate to their 'outside' concerns and share their opinions, experiences and feelings through classroom learning activities.
- Building up spaces for freer speaking and writing activities.

#### Postscript

We wish to record that very sadly, Faisullah (see Faisullah's story in section 3) took his own life on 4 July the last day of term.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A**

Lisette asked her teacher to explain the meaning of the questions on this questionnaire from her solicitor

Re: Immigration  
 In an effort to provide a more efficient service to our clients we have prepared the following questionnaire and should be grateful if you would spend a few moments to complete and return the same to us.  
 The replies are confidential - if you do require a response please mark the form accordingly  
 We thank you for your assistance.

Please tick the appropriate box in relation to each question.

	Question	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
people friendly?	1 Was the service approachable and friendly?					
Did they tell me what was happening?	2 Were you kept informed throughout the matter?					
Was it quick?	3 Were matters managed in a competent and timely manner?					
Did they explain to you?	4 Was all relevant information explained satisfactorily?					
Did they work hard for you?	5 Whatever the outcome of the case, did the fee earner appear to have worked diligently and with concern for you?					

Are there any other matters you wish to mention in relation to the service provided by the fee earner or other members of staff?  
 Dated  
 Signed

Please return this form to

This form is difficult for anyone with less than an advanced level of English to understand for the following reasons:

- The form is written in a rather old-fashioned, formal style quite distant from everyday spoken language. For example *if you require* instead of 'if you want' or *timely manner* instead of 'on time', *fee earner* instead of 'solicitor', *diligently* instead of 'well' or 'did a good job'.
- Complex grammatical structures are commonly used. For example: *should be grateful if you could spend, appear to have worked diligently, in relation to the service provided.*
- Question 5 also starts with a complex nominal phrase – *whatever the outcome of the case* making the whole question a challenge even for advanced learners.
- The use of nominalisations and the passive, for example *the service, were you kept informed, were matters managed, was explained* takes away any sense of actual people doing things, which is what Lisette will have actually experienced.

As you can see from Lisette's notes on the left-hand side, she needed help from the teacher to work out the meanings of these questions.

### Appendix B

Guidelines for a research activity when students took their own photos to represent their feelings about life in Blackburn

## LIFE IN BLACKBURN – A PHOTO JOURNAL

Take photos to show what you feel about living in Blackburn.

Some things to think about when taking photos:

- Where you live
- Where you go/what you do
- People you know/friends
- Things/places you like
- Things/places you don't like
- What makes life difficult
- What makes you feel happy
- What makes you feel unhappy
- What you think is funny (makes you laugh!)
- What seems strange to you

**Appendices Ci and Di**

**Ci:** Photos taken by students in a research activity to represent their feelings about life in Blackburn (see Appendix B)



Above: **Ferdinand lying on his bed thinking about his family**

Left: **Joelle's photo of a place which reminds her of her own country**

Below: **Omar feels sad and homesick when he hears the busker**



**Cii:** Joelle's writing about the photos she took

I really like Darwin Towel pictures, because there it is in my country many places like that I saw when I was in Darwin Towel. So when I miss my country when I see the pictures. And also it was surprise to see a water from stream in (water fall) in England.

Another picture is me and my colleague! When I was here first time, it was very difficult to speak English! I was afraid when I saw somebody speaking English and I think if will I can to speak British language?

That picture make me happy because I was with somebody speaking English! and I can speak little (no really) with him. It's why I thanks so much Wendy to help me to learn English



**Di:** Lisette's photos



**Left:** Lisette eating African food with her friends from Leeds  
**Below:** Lisette shopping in a Leeds market where she saw African food for sale



**Above:** Lisette sitting in her room feeling sad after receiving a letter from the Home Office



Dii: Lisette's writing about the photos she took

26103103

## Describing pictures

### My photographs

1. The picture who I feel sad, in my house in the living room. The bad day for me, because I received the letter from home office for leave house. About this problem I take the picture for remember that. I picture I make feel sad.
2. In Leeds, in the market, we choised the clothes because they were very cheaper. I like this market, its very interesting because we bought the different things, I saw african food in inside.
3. My friends in Leeds do my hair in their home. they are nice friends for me. because they arn't ask me money, they are funny for me. I love them.
4. After plait me hair in their house, they cooked the good foods: rice, chicken and cassava. I like it. We have very happy to eade together.

Thanks to read

my composition

## Case study two - Heterogeneity

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“We mingle with each other like friends”: heterogeneity, responsibility and resourcefulness in community ESOL classes

Paul Shrubshall, Priti Chopra and Celia Roberts

### Introduction

Learners in ESOL classes, particularly community-based classes, have heterogeneous past educational experiences, needs, (language) skills, and perspectives on learning.

Heterogeneity is commonly viewed as something “brought along” to the ESOL classroom by learners (e.g. DfEE, 2000, 26) and appropriate classroom responses to this diversity are described in general terms (e.g. DfEE, 2001, 5). In this case study we will focus on how heterogeneity is *produced* within classroom practices by learners and teachers. We will look in detail at particular features of interaction and pedagogic practices, asking two main questions:

- How does heterogeneity show itself within classroom interaction?
- How do teachers and learners manage classroom interaction so that learning can take place which is useful for all participants?

This is a case study of two London community-based classes: Green Dale (not its real name), located in a London Primary School, and TRAG, which takes place in a Tamil support centre.

### Methods and data collection

We draw on methods of micro-ethnography, combining (1) a concern for learners' and teachers' perspectives, (2) the ways meanings emerge within the details of talk in interaction, and (3) an interest in understanding these meanings within wider classroom practices.

The methods of data collection (February–April 2003) are as follows:

Green Dale	TRAG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 13 classroom observations</li> <li>■ eight of these sessions audio-recorded and selectively transcribed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ nine classroom participant observations</li> <li>■ two audio-recorded (and transcribed) sessions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ three ethnographic interviews in L1 (1 per learner) focusing on learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ six preliminary structured interviews with learners (Tamil translations for three of the learners)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ second round of interviews with same learners focusing on play-back of audio-recording extracts (2 in L1 and one in English)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ three in-depth semi-structured interviews with three learners (Tamil translation by TRAG women's welfare co-ordinator, Sugi)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ four ethnographic interviews with the teacher, including retrospective discussion of remembered classroom moments (notes taken by interviewer)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ three in-depth semi-structured interviews with the three key people working in TRAG – Ms. Sugi, Mr.Nava and Mr.Caro</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ teacher as interviewer and translator for one learner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ ongoing informal discussion and collaboration on research process with tutor</li> </ul>

We will consider each site separately, first looking at Green Dale.

### Green Dale class

The class at Green Dale provides opportunities for learners to display their personal and shared identities, where they can “be themselves” in English. Heterogeneity is to be found within these relatively accommodating classroom practices. This kind of heterogeneity allows for continuity: the class can fit into learners' complicated lives – both their lives outside the classroom and how they bring this “outside” into the classroom in terms of their roles, identities and experiences.

We will characterise this heterogeneity by giving a general account of the class and its practices, and then look in detail at some revealing classroom episodes.

### Background information

Funded by the Learning Skills Council, this class of women meet twice a week throughout the academic year. All but one of the learners have children in the school in which the class is located. There are ten regular attenders and the average attendance is seven. Four learners have been in the class for two and a half years, the others joining more recently. A variety of languages are spoken: Urdu (three students), Arabic (three), Dari (two), Somali (one),

Romanian (one), Albanian (one). The teacher, Rania<sup>1</sup> (“a mother tongue Arabic and English as a first language speaker”)<sup>2</sup>, has been teaching the class for two years. (See appendix 2 for more information on 3 key learners and the teacher.)

The learners have various language levels, ranging from top Entry 1 to low Entry 3. Learners outside these levels are referred to classes at the main college site. The class “group goals” (for the observation period drawing largely on the Entry 1 curriculum) are negotiated with the learners, and so draw on ILPs as well as a suggested scheme of work mapped on to elements from the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (Entry 2).

### Classroom practices

It is 30 minutes from the end of the lesson. Learners have already shared news about their half term holidays, talked about holiday pictures (from a photocopy of “Headway Starter”), done a grammar exercise on the past tense based on the holiday theme and have just finished their break during which information about absent students has been shared. Learners get into pairs and tell their partners about their half term holidays, “five sentences with not, and five positive sentences”, until Rania brings the class together to report back on their conversations, giving a positive and a negative sentence about their partner. Although grammar has to be attended to, this report-back becomes an opportunity to make comments about what’s been said, both about oneself and others. A rich multi-layered kind of talk ensues, with references to personal shared knowledge about learners’ lives, particularly daily routines and family. For example, doing cleaning becomes a running theme. Sana says about her partner “she didn’t clean her house”, and Rania responds with “good, great Uli!” (Sana has already said some time before that she didn’t do any cleaning during the half term holiday.) Uli a little later says about Sana “she did cleaning” and Sana confirms this in a playful tone of voice, “I clean *every day!*” Others repeat “every day” and there is laughter.

The above activity exemplifies one kind of classroom practice (or more precisely a sub-practice as we will see below). There are four main kinds:

- (1) Learners work individually (sometimes helped by Rania). There are homework-checking sessions, tests, and individual work on grammar exercises (from “Grammar in Use”).
- (2) Texts/materials are brought in from outside the class, e.g. school letters, newsletters, videos, and they are explained to learners. (Other texts used, but not during observation period, include local newspapers and children’s story books.)
- (3) Learners spend a lot of time telling one another about themselves during breaks (they make tea, hand round food), in quietly spoken conversations as they are doing or finishing academic tasks, and in news-telling sessions at the beginning of the lesson. Topics in news-telling vary: half term holidays, the weekend, family, food, current events/happenings – the Gulf War and religious festivals.
- (4) Learners use EFL texts (e.g. “Headway” and “Test Your Vocabulary”) and Rania’s own materials. There is emphasis on getting language form and pronunciation right. Learners work in pairs and take part in whole-class practices such as checking answers to gapfill exercises, talking about pictures, and text-based drills.

The “give five negative/positive sentences” activity described above is a sub-practice of this text-based pedagogy (practice 4). We will call this the *fast grammar package* (on the fast food analogy of easy, consumable chunks). A language form is lifted out of a text-oriented practice

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1. Names of teacher and key learners have been changed.

2. This is Rania’s own wording.

and performed orally for a short time with close monitoring and evaluation by teacher and learners. There is a focus on getting language form and pronunciation right, but this package soon opens up to include references to personal and shared knowledge/experience. There are pedagogic question-answer sequences but learners also take control of talk, making it more conversational. Learners are “being themselves”, invoking their identities as mothers, wives and friends (with one another) and so bringing in practice (3).

Practices (3) and (4) are mixed in other ways: learners carry on working in breaks or chatting (in Urdu or Arabic) after the break has finished and news-telling can be inserted into lulls in language-practice activities. After the class, learners sit in a nearby hall to catch up on news and help one another with their homework.

In order to give a learner perspective on heterogeneity in this classroom, it will be useful to study fast grammar packages in more detail: this practice is pedagogically “all grammar”, but learners’ own meanings, which go beyond grammar, can be clearly discerned within this “simple” language-practice framework. It becomes a multi-levelled practice. So, our question becomes: *how does heterogeneity feature in fast grammar packages?*

In the following sections we’ll look in more detail at important classroom moments, asking what heterogeneity means to learners and teachers. We will show how heterogeneity is constituted in the ways they negotiate and sometimes contest ways of talking and how this heterogeneity is working at a number of different levels: different experiences brought in, different orientations to learning and access to different kinds of language/interaction and knowledge.

### Fast grammar packages

At first glance ‘fast grammar packages’ may seem to be solely about language-form practice, but there is much more than language-form practice going on: learners and teacher add to the package. In this first extract a learner has to make a sentence with “watched” and achieves this (with help): “I watched yesterday bad news (lines 3 and 5). There then follows some talk about what this bad news can be (lines 7 and 14):

#### *Extract 1<sup>3</sup>*

Learners are throwing a ball to one another and saying a verb that they have just encountered in a Headway pronunciation exercise. The person who catches the ball makes a sentence using that verb. A little earlier a learner has made a sentence which is about the Egyptian-Israeli war.

- |                   |                                    |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 Rania (teacher) | ok you can do watched,             |
| 2 S               | I watched.                         |
| 3 Nada            | I watched yesterday,               |
| 4 S               | I watched yesterday er news about, |
| 5 Nada            | bad news.                          |
| 6 S?              | ( ) war?                           |
| 7 Uli             | the six day wa(h)r hh              |
| 8 Nada            | bad news.                          |
| 9?                | ( )                                |

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3. For transcription symbols see appendix 1.

10 Nada? I watch? or,  
 11 ? ( )  
 12 Nada I watch yesterday in tv,  
 13 Rania I watched tv.  
 14 Nada it's fighting you know with Iraq and er

How is “getting language form right” (lines 1–5) related to the other activity of elaborating on the nature of the bad news (lines 6–14)? Which activity is most important (and for whom)? Does the talk about bad news support the fast grammar package or is it the other way round? We are interested in how learners and teacher answer these questions (in other words, in what a multi-levelled practice means for learners and teacher) and so we should look in detail at how this kind of exchange is assembled by the participants.

By looking carefully at the notion of *repair*, we can see how “getting talk right” is performed and what else is going on as this gets done. *Repair* is the “practice (of) dealing with problems or troubles in speaking, hearing, and understanding (talk)” (Schegloff, 2000, 207). An analysis of repair:

- shows how speakers display shared understanding as well as misunderstanding
- can show what speakers think they know about talk
- is about responsibility for/in talk; repair need not be just correction of *language* but of what is *said* (claimed) by a speaker
- expresses relationships (of power/control as well as solidarity/closeness) between speakers; compare pedagogic correction with repair of content by intimates, e.g. in story telling.

So repair is about managing social relations in talk of which correction is only a part.

### Repair in fast grammar packages

In extract 1 (above) the challenge is to make a sentence which has the correct form, say something specific about the past and not the present and say something true, newsworthy, and interpersonally relevant and appropriate. Nada has, with help, constructed a sentence “I watched yesterday bad news” (lines 3 and 5). This is grammatically correct but interpersonally uninteresting. The utterance and idea is elaborated by Uli’s “six day war” (line 7) which links their present talk with a learner’s earlier utterances about hating the 1967 Israeli war and liking the 1973 war (not in the above data). Uli’s repair not only refers to real and serious events and makes links between what learners are (or could) be saying, but positions herself as knowledgeable about these matters. This extract exemplifies recurrent features of this activity: getting language-form right is not the only concern and learners play an active part in doing repair, particularly the kind of repair which goes beyond language form.

In extract 2, from the same activity, repair is again used to widen out from the linguistic form to interpersonal work. Firstly, there is a repair of language form (lines 17–23 below), then another repair-initiation (line 24 ff.) whose character appears to change. This new kind of repair is done in a highly collaborative way.

### Extract 2

Nada throws the ball to A, supplying in line 1 the verb for A to make a sentence from.

1 Nada (A's NAME) LOVE.

2 ??	hhhhhhhh
3 Uli	love.
4 Nada	love.
5 Sana	but what you make liked.
6 ?	love.
7 Nada	I like my father in law.
8 ??	hhhhhhh
9 Sana	ok.
10 Nada	what about you now?
11 Nada	you, YOU?
12 S	you A.
13 Fatma	love. love.
14 Rania	all these sentences must be about something in the past,
15	love
16 Nada	love
17 A	yes, I love, I love my family.
18 Nada	yes good.
19 Rania	that's now, I want you to use.
20 ?	in the past, but now,
21 Fatma	I loved,
22 Rania	I want you to use this one,
23 A	yes I loved my family.
24 Rania	but you <u>still</u> love your family.
25 A	yes,
26 Shazia	loved go back.
27 O	maybe now er hated hhhhh
28 ??	hhhhhhh
29 Rania	very good O.
30 S	maybe now she hated,
31 ??	hhhh
32 Sana	you (ma)( )(col)( ) (A's name)
33 ??	hhhhhhhhhh
34 Nada	A, before you love, but now,
35 O	hate.
36 Nada	you still hhhhh
37 ?	hhhhhhhhhhhh
38 ??	hh
39 Sana	no no no, O said before hated, now love.
40 Rania	you loved your family when you were a child?
41 A	yes.
42 Rania	alright, ok, sorry, go on,
43 Fatma	{{Arabic}} {{throw it to someone quickly}} <sup>4</sup>
44 Nada	{{Arabic}} {{who to?}}

The point of the language exercise is to make a sentence which expresses something about the past and not the present, and A's sentence (line 23) doesn't quite do this. "I loved my family" suggests some qualification is coming – for example, 'loved' in the past suggests a

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4. Translation from Arabic.



possible contrast with the situation now. There is a repair of A's conceptual confusion by Rania: "but you still love your family" (line 24). A's "yes" (line 25) shows that she does not regard Rania's utterance as an encouragement to repair and S tries again: "loved go back" (line 26). Instead of others completing the repair (as happens in other data) by adding a time/place adverbial phrase, O gives an account of why A could have said what she did (at lines 23 and 25): "maybe now hated" (line 27). This is repeated by S (line 30) and becomes a jointly constructed idea (and shared joke between Nada and O) with Nada's "A, before you love but now" (line 34) and O's "hate" (line 35). This comic elaboration transforms a grammatical problem into an interpersonal one. O and others are proposing an idea that is potentially face-threatening: A's negative feelings for her family. Rania's "you loved your family when you were a child" (line 40) is not so much a solution to the grammatical problem – it could still be challenged as line 23 was – as the beginning of a jointly achieved closure to this humorous play on the grammatical and interpersonal problem (see lines 43 and 44).

Addressing question 1 (see introduction), we have shown how heterogeneity is related to the ways learners and teacher are together making and remaking decisions about what being correct means. We have seen learners bring their own concerns to the task of "getting language right"; students are broadening the criteria for what is to count as being (in)correct so that personal opinions (e.g. what counts as bad news), managing possible face-threatening moments (e.g. what A says about her family), working in laughter (e.g. O's line 27 in extract 2) all count as part of the language in use in the classroom.

We have also seen how it is just as important for learners to respond to repair as to simple grammar correction. In real life encounters, understanding a repair like Rania's "but you still love your family" could be much more significant than noticing the need to correct the past tense. Managing these kinds of indirect repairs from institutional gatekeepers are at least as important as mastering verb morphology.

We have proposed some analytic concepts and located some interactional features of classroom practices that allow us to see how pedagogy which prioritises language form is oriented to, and then subverted by students in fast grammar packages. Our proposal is that heterogeneity in language learning can be displayed by looking through this analytic lens. In the next section we will look at how learners make use of and regard these features of classroom practices. (This will help us with question 2.)

### **Students' participation in repair**

Sana, Fatma and Nada talk about the classroom, particularly the event from which extract 2 is taken.

For Sana learning and helping are closely related; it's important that "everybody together looks after each other in the class". In talking about extract 2 Sana says<sup>5</sup>:

*To correct one another is good – there is no jealousy – we care for each other.*

Although Sana participates in playful repair (see extract 2, line 39) by varying the joke (quite late on), she doesn't instigate playful repair. Sana, in commenting on extract 2, says that for her laughter is a way of moving out of embarrassment:

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5. Notes made by interviewer.

*We laugh when someone says something embarrassing and awkward – in my mind I will be thinking why is she saying this – and I will laugh to change the mood.*

We have already talked about the playful way A's conceptual difficulty with "loved my family" is turned into an interpersonal issue (extract 2). Nada plays an active role in this: her utterance "A, before you love, now" (line 34) is made into a playful encouragement to repair by O's "hate" (line 35). The repair mechanism is used to move away from a serious concern with form and concept to a more playful use of language. Nada often has a hand in creating the embarrassing and awkward moments that Sana regards laughter as an escape from. In the course of talking about extract 2 Nada says that people think when they laugh.

Fatma takes part in repair, particularly of language form (e.g. extract 2, line 21), but she neither initiates play nor language-form repair. Fatma talks about the relationship between the friendliness of the class and the way that learners can help and correct one another:

*We help each other, we correct one another...because we mingle with each other, like friends, so they'll correct you when you make errors.*

For Fatma the advantage of this kind of helpful correction is in getting more efficiently to the correct answer: "if you share this thinking you can make sure this is right and this is wrong". Playful use of language is less of a cognitive tool (as it is for Nada) and more of a smoothing of the way to learning.

In this section we have seen how learners' different attitudes to learning and language practice are displayed in interaction. In earlier sections we have seen how learners share knowledge, e.g. of one another's families and personal experiences. The exchanging of opinions and experiences do not just exhibit what these learners have in common (e.g. knowing what counts as bad news, extract 1), but provides material for interpersonally riskier kinds of talk and language learning (e.g. "problematic" family relationships in extract 2) which reveals/constructs difference. Differences between learners, their experiences and their different approaches to language practice are worked out in interaction and used to enhance learning. The learners draw on the resources of the class and the setting to make learning happen.

### **Resources and resourcefulness**

The opportunities to learn much more than prescribed language form are created, even in these fast grammar packages, through several learner practices facilitated or encouraged by Rania:

- 1 The fuzziness of the boundary between inside and outside the class provides opportunities for academic work to be relayed from learner to learner, e.g. learners in the break and at the beginning of the lesson frequently explain to one another previous lessons or materials, and this is reported to happen also in the after-class sessions.
- 2 Friendships (an academic resource) are created within the porous boundaries of the classroom. The observed classroom practices appear not just to accommodate to the learning approaches, identities and friendships of the learners we interviewed, but to actively create them. Language learning is as much about learning to manage social relations in the second language as about learning language form.
- 3 In our data overt structures and predictable tasks go hand in hand with improvisation and linguistic creativity. The curriculum of language forms allows for playful language-use,

provided the opportunities and conditions mentioned in (1) and (2) are in place. Academic and social relationships within the classroom enter into the make-up of this particular kind of play.

Let us now consider the different heterogeneous practices of the TRAG class.

## **TRAG**

Although all the learners are Tamil speakers and at Entry Level 1 (so apparently homogeneous), the TRAG class is heterogeneous at the level of explicit, teacher-led pedagogies which are tuned to the different language levels of the students within Entry 1. There are fewer opportunities (and time – since this course is only for 16 weeks) for the kind of identity-work that goes on at Green Dale and the lower level of the learners overall limits some of the language play and pragmatic work seen in Rania's class. Heterogeneous classroom practices allow for progress along a particular academic route and this is supported by the learners' strategic use of Tamil.

### **Background information**

The ESOL class is based at the Tamil Refugee Action Group (TRAG) in Willesden, North London and runs for 16 weeks for four hours per week. TRAG is a drop-in centre that provides, in Tamil, advocacy, information and support in relation to: immigration, asylum, welfare benefits, housing, education, employment and training, primary and mental health care, women's issues and care of the elderly and people with special-needs. TRAG is run by three Tamil Sri Lankans supported by volunteers and outreach workers. TRAG is funded by the Association of London Government, the City Parochial Foundation, the Community Fund and Comic Relief. Louise, the ESOL teacher, is paid by North West London College.

Louise works at the North West London College as a fractional member of staff and this class is just one amongst many others that she is the tutor for. TRAG provides administration, translation and interpretation support to Louise to facilitate learner retention and enrolment on the ESOL course. There are nine regular learners in the class, eight females and one male. All learners are at Entry 1(E1). Learners have been separated into three levels – high E1, middle E1 and lower E1. Based on issues highlighted during initial classes, Louise develops her own ESOL worksheets for the class. All of the learners come from Sri Lanka and range in age from 72 to 24 years old. They have been in the UK for between three months and three years. All of them have studied up to 16–18 years of age. However, any further studies have been interrupted by marriage or disrupted by the political situation and displacement in their own country or to other countries. (See appendix 3 for information on key learners and teacher.)

### **Classroom practices**

It is about an hour into the two hour lesson. The class has been practising asking for and telling the time and Louise has just finished eliciting and writing a list of everyday actions, "wake up", "get up", etc., on the board, practising the pronunciation with everyone as this list is made. Louise says: "very good, now if we want to know about the time for this, what's the question?" With the help of Cuisenaire rods Louise and the students build the question "What time do you wake up?" Learners are at first a little tentative, so Louise says "let's have some energy" and they continue to practise, taking turns to say the question on their own. Louise then gets learners to ask questions to one another across the class, e.g. "Kareena question

Seema” before bringing this part of the lesson to a close with “ok good that’s fine, lovely”. During this stretch of activity, the audio-recording hasn’t picked up any Tamil use. Louise explains that they will “practise this a little bit more, the speaking and pronunciation” and demonstrates the new pair-work activity. They work together in their pairs on this task and a lot of Tamil is now used.

The class has some very explicit and systematic practices and procedures which are explained to the class in Tamil at the beginning of the course. There is a clear class agenda which is written up at the start of each lesson and which learners copy into their diaries. It normally consists of:

- Spelling.
- Review of previous lesson.
- Drilling and oral practising of the topic from the scheme of work.
- Pair and group activity, practising speaking and writing, structured through worksheets.

Although superficially homogeneous (all are Tamil speakers at E1), this class is heterogeneous in many ways and Louise uses a number of strategies for managing the heterogeneity:

- Distinct seating arrangements: three levels (low, middle and high E1) on three different tables.
- A mix of “high” and “low” levels to provide support to each other (e.g. Louise encourages learners on different tables to interact with each other through pair work, group work, class mingles, collaborative writing, jigsaw, listening and writing activities).
- Differentiation of tasks: different tables can work on different tasks (e.g. Louise uses matching exercises, copying, ordering, simplifying activities, visual prompts and “language frames” for lower level learners).
- Expose learners to different text types as they are new to language learning. Language is presented in different ways to help address needs of different learning styles (e.g. Louise uses forms, worksheets with pictures and diagrams and different types of writing activities).
- Use authentic materials relevant to learners’ lives – every lesson involves classroom activities where learners write or speak about themselves and their experiences (e.g. Louise has asked people to write about their family, their own routines, health and housing problems). Heterogeneous experiences brought into the classroom form the basis for working on differentiated and graded language tasks with learners at different stages of the E1 level.
- Use teacher materials and the resources of learners for recycling, extension and practice activities (e.g. repetition of the content of lessons, but also extending knowledge where difficulties in understanding emerge and incorporating space for further practice activities – see the data extracts below); Louise also makes use of controlled writing practice, copying, word searches, language frames, a phonic approach to reading, pronunciation work at all stages, choral, open air and individual drilling, spelling tests, repeated and extended practice activities to build learners’ language competence; the same task is differentiated across different tables.
- Use learners’ first language as a positive basis for acquisition of English; recognise students’ in-depth knowledge of other literacies to help overcome learner errors (see data extract 3 below).

### **Heterogeneity and L1**

The analytic focus of this second part of the case study is on the use of L1 (the primary spoken language – see the last bullet point above). Despite the apparent homogeneity of this

class, differences within the E1 level mean that Tamil plays a significant role in supporting the conceptual and procedural work of these tasks. The challenge for Louise is to achieve progress in a tight time schedule. This puts a high premium on planning, structure and control. As a non-Tamil speaker she has to weigh up the value of the learners using only English which she can control against allowing/encouraging Tamil which she cannot control.

Tamil is very rarely used during drills or Louise's "teaching" moments of class activities. Tamil is mainly used (1) when it is elicited by Louise to facilitate explanations and clarification and (2) during pair or group work (to do activities, discuss tasks, do repair, clarify spellings and make private comments about class activities). In the next section we will ask: *How exactly do participants use Tamil in order to successfully negotiate their way through language-form oriented practice? How is the use of Tamil managed by students and teacher?* We will look at the differences in Tamil-use between whole class and pair/group work contexts, starting with what learners and the teacher say about classroom Tamil-use and then turning to actual uses.

#### **Teacher's and learners' attitudes to use of L1 in the classroom**

Louise views Tamil as a resource for English language learning. She says:

*It can be very helpful and is often the essential framework upon which students build L2.*

For Louise the ways Tamil is to be used in the classroom need to be carefully thought about. Although her view is that the use of L1 is "not a problem globally", she says:

*"Students' first language can cause interference and some errors in English can be linked to L1". So, "at certain points in the lesson it's better not to have conversation in Tamil" and therefore sometimes "students are discouraged" from using Tamil.*

For Louise, then, Tamil is an invaluable resource for her classroom pedagogy, particularly for explanation, but one which has to be gently controlled.

Two of the learners, Rajkumari and Maya, during their interviews mentioned that they do not know how to use words or make sentences in English and so use Tamil as a resource for learning. Using Tamil helps them to express what they are saying. With the help of others they can then work towards developing this into sentences to use for the classroom task. For instance, Maya commented:

*If we don't know the meaning of the words, then we use Tamil ... I only use (Tamil) whenever I don't understand, (then) I ask the other group.*

Rajkumari also responded that she preferred using Tamil to ask questions or provide explanations, saying:

*I can say the word, but I don't know how to make a sentence from that word ... that is why I ask in Tamil.*

Learners appreciate that their use of Tamil is constrained by classroom practice. Rajkumari says:

*In the beginning we don't know, we all speak in Tamil during the class. Then we become afraid to speak in Tamil, because it's not good when you are learning English – we are the ones that are going to be affected. The teacher said to talk in English, and learn English as well.*

Learners regard the balance between the use of English and Tamil quite positively. Rajkumari gives reasons for having a non-Tamil teacher:

Interviewer: *Would it be better if the tutor spoke Tamil?*

Rajkumari: *Ah. In a way it is good ... but it is going to confuse everyone ... now we ask only one or two words which we don't know in English ... ah ... If it is a Tamil teacher then we will all start to speak in Tamil, then it is going to be like a Tamil lesson.*

Similarly, Maya says:

*I only use Tamil when I don't understand – I ask the other group.*

Tamil is regarded as a resource for explanation, but to see what this means exactly, we need to look at what is going on in the classroom. In our data we can see that from time to time Louise invites learners to give translations and explanations of grammar points to one another. But what is particularly interesting is the way learners do a lot of work to make sense of a language point and to organise themselves as collaborative learners/teachers.

### Use of L1 in pair work and whole class tasks

#### Extract 3

In this extract Louise initiates the Tamil talk. Towards the end of the lesson Louise has been conjugating the verb “get up” on the board, emphasising the third person “s” and word order in questions. Louise writes: “I get up”, “you get up”, “he/she/it gets up”, “we get up”, “they get up” on the board. She then asks Maya and Kareena (the low E1 students) to repeat the pronouns – “I”, “you”, etc. Louise then asks “someone” to translate these to check that “they” (Maya and Kareena) “know these”. Sushma and Parvati are on the middle entry one table, Krishna and Vanita are at the top entry one table. L = Louise; Su = Sushma; Ka = Krishna; Va = Vanita; P = Parvati.

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1 L   | we we we erm, can someone just translate these for me in Tamil, just so I can I please see queries |
| 2     | want to check they know these,   |
| 3 ?   | I  |
| 4 Su  | I ENRAL NAN (means “I”) we ENRAL ERANDU (means “we”) <sup>6</sup>                                  |
| 5     | PARUKKU (two people)   |
| 6 Va  | ONRUKKU MALPATVARGAL (more than one)   |
| 7 Su  | you ENRAL ORU ALL (means one person)   |
| 8 Va  | ENRAL NEENGAL (means “you” (plural))   |
| 9 Ka  | NI (you)   |
| 10 Su | NI (you)   |
| 11 P  | NI (you)   |

6. Translations from Tamil are shown in brackets.

12 P	they ENRAL NEENGAL (means "you" (plural))
13 Va	AVARGAL (they)
14 Su	AVARGAL (they)
15 Va	they AVARGAL ENRAL AVARGAL (means "they")
16 Su	she ENRAL AVAL (means "she"), he ENRAL AVAN (means "he"), it
17	ENRAL ATHU (means "it"), we ENRAL NAANGAL (means "we"), they
18	ENRAL AVARGAL (means "they")
19 L	ok thank you so we just need to remember our "s" here and we can do the
20	same for many different verbs, like we had wake up, get up, have a
21	shower, I have shower, he?
22 Su	have has a shower.

The task of translating the pronouns on the board is not straightforward. There are two second person pronoun forms in Tamil, "NEENGAL" (plural) and "NI" (singular) and Louise has only written one "you" pronoun on the board, the singular "you" (between "I" and "he/she/it"). In this exchange we can see learners sorting out this conceptual issue for themselves and having to correct each other in the process.

Louise begins by giving the floor to "someone", i.e. all learners, to make the grammar clear for Maya and Kareena. Sushma (on the middle E1 table) begins (lines 4 and 5) and ends (lines 16–18) this explanatory sequence, but in the course of this explanation is corrected and supported by others. Vanita (on the high E1 table) corrects Sushma's gloss of "we" as "PARUKKU (two people)" (line 5) with her own gloss, "ONRUKKU MALPATVARGAL (more than one)". Vanita's repair, "ENRAL NEENGAL (means "you" (plural))" (line 8), of Sushma's gloss on "you" (line 7) is in turn repaired by others (lines 9–11). Learners are sorting out the meaning of "you" within the context of Louise's explanation. This sorting out perhaps is continued with the third main repair: Vanita corrects Parvati's claim that "they" means "NEENGAL" (line 12) with her line 13: "AVARGAL".

To summarise:

- Through the use of L1 learners are collaboratively clarifying and extending their understanding of grammar (which involves drawing on one another's expertise).
- The use of L1 facilitates a sharing of control of ways of teaching and this enables learning to take place in a way that is useful for all participants.
- Control is not only shared between learners and tutor but between the learners on different tables (levels), e.g. Vanita intervenes and then allows Sushma the space to continue. She does not take over. L1 is used in a supportive way to help each other.

#### *Extract 4*

This pair work activity was briefly described above. In this example, learners choose to switch to Tamil. Students have been practising asking and answering such questions as "what time do you get up?" with eight everyday routine verbs. There are two learners, Maya and Kareena (on the low E1 table). They have each been given a chart on which to write a name and time next to four phrases, "wake up", "get up", "have a shower", and "have breakfast", and Louise gives them some instructions for how to do this. They have been working on this activity for a few minutes and have already completed the first 2 parts of the table – "wake up" and "get up". M = Maya; K = Kareena.

- 1 K what time do you have breakfast,  
 2 K breakfast,  
 3 M *ENRAL (what does that mean?)*  
 4 K *SAPPIRANEENGAL (breakfast)*  
 5 M nine o'clock.  
 6 M *ENTHINE MANIKKU SAPPIRANEENGAL (what time do you have breakfast?)*  
 7 K ten thirty.  
 8 M ten thirty.  
 9 M *ENNANRU ENNAVATHU (how come? then what time do you come here?)*  
 10  
 11 M *NANUM ONPATHU MUPATHU ENRU POTDUDAN ONPATHU ENRU*  
 12 *PODUNGO EANENRAL ENKU ENGALUKKU ONPATHU MUPATHUKKU*  
 13 *VAKUPPU ELLO? (put nine o'clock because we have our class at nine thirty)*

The complexity of the task is bound up with the work of completing the chart. Learners need to manage this task as they produce and respond to questions, so they need to do work to orient to both the oral language production activity and the text-based one. We will look at how this is done and what more is going on in addition to the exchange of information and its efficient management.

Learners not only ask one another "What time do you ..." questions and respond in English, but they have to do work to get to this position. This means working out the meanings of words (line 3, extract 4 above). Learners also need to organise turn taking as the following extract from the same activity shows (line 8):

*Extract 5*

- 1 M what time *do* you, wake um,  
 2 L good.  
 3 K six thirty.  
 4 L ok, good so you write six thirty.  
 5 ? six,  
 ((L leaves))  
 6 K six thirty.  
 7 K what,  
 8 M *NEENAL ENNAI KELUNGO (you ask me)*  
 9 K what er what time?  
 10 M mm  
 11 K what time,  
 12 M what time,  
 13 K do you?  
 14 M wake up.  
 15 K wake up.

Learners ask one another for help with remembering question words. Just before the exchange in extract 5 K asks M for help with "What time do you"

*Extract 6*

- 1 K *NEATHTHAI ENNANRU KEKKIRATHU (how do you ask the time?)*  
 2 M mm?  
 3 K *ENNANRU KEKKIRATHU (how do you ask?)*



4 M what's the time, do you wake um

Learners not only have to write names and times in the chart, but do work to write times that are logical:

*Extract 7*

1 M get up *ELUMPIRATHU ETHANE MANIKU (what time?)*  
 2 K seven thirty, er six thirty.  
 3 M er six thirty?  
 4 K six thirty.  
 5 M *ETHULU ENNA ELUTHUKIRATHU (what do we have to write here?)*  
 6 K *ATHAI ARU MANI ENRU POTDU ETHAI ARU ARAI ENRU PODUVAM*  
*(that one we put six o'clock, this one seven o'clock)*

Kareena answers that she gets up at the same time as she wakes up (earlier she had said that she wakes up at 6.30 a.m.) and is asked by Maya (in Tamil) what she is to write (extract 7, line 5); Kareena then seems to change her answers so that they are different and sequenced – “that one we put 6.00 a.m., this one 7.00 a.m.” (line 6) (again, in Tamil). Also, Maya (extract 4, line 9) doesn't accept Kareena's answer that she has breakfast at 10.30 a.m. (line 7) and seems to write a different time, 9.00 a.m., to fit in with the class schedule of starting at 9.30 a.m.

Tamil is sometimes used to perform the task itself. The language drill element of this task consists of each question being asked by each student to complete her chart. Returning to extract 4, Kareena's question “what time do you have breakfast” is asked in English (line 1). An answer is given by Maya who then asks her question in Tamil (line 9). This question functions to complete the chart (Maya in lines 11–13 orients to text-construction) rather than as language-form practice (of the phrase “what time do you have breakfast?”). For learners at this moment completing the text overrides language practice.

To summarise, in this activity (extracts 4–7):

- There is more than language-form practice going on.
- Other meaning-making practices are bound up with learners' sense of when and how long everyday actions take place (so the final text which they construct is consistent with the logic of the actual timetable of their lives).
- Tamil is used to orient to, prepare for and perform the task.

*Extract 8*

Louise is writing a list of everyday routine verbs on the board, starting with “wake up”. She mimes and acts out the meaning with an exaggerated yawning and stretching sound/movement. The class then practise the pronunciation of “wake up”, one at a time, going around the class. Rajkumari, Parvathi, Sushma and Sunita are on the middle E1 table, Krishna and Vanita are at the top E1 table, Kareena and Maya are at the lower Entry Level 1 table. L = Louise; R = Rajkumari; Va = Vanita; K = Kareena; M = Maya; Po = Parvathi; Su = Sushma; St = Sunita.

1 R wake up.  
 2 St wake up.  
 3 M wake up.  
 4 K wake up.

5 L	good WAKE up.
6 ??	wake up.
7 L	<u>wake</u> up.
8 ??	wake up.
9 R	wake up <i>ENRAL ENNA (what does this mean?)</i>
10 Va	<i>INTHA NITHIRYALA ELUNTHU KANN MULICHU PAKIRATHU (when</i>
11	<i>you wake up you open your eyes)</i>
12 L	wake up.
13 Va	get up <i>ENRAL PADUKAIVIDDU ELUMPI IRUKIRATHU (means get up</i>
14	<i>from the bed and sit down on the bed)</i>
15 R	<i>ENNA SPELLING (how do you spell it?)</i>
16 Va	“w” “a” “k” “e”
17 R	“w”?
18 Va	“a” “a”
19 L	don't worry about writing now, we'll do it in a minute.
20	first speaking, and then writing.
21?	{ }
22 Va	“w” “a” “k” “e”
23	<i>ORU KOD PORRU (put a dash) “u” “p” wake up</i>
24 L	we'll look at it in a minute ok, the spelling
25 R	“w” “a” “k” “e”
26 Su	wake up.
27 R	wake up, ok
28	so wake up when you're eyes open, sleeping and then,
29 Va	eyes open
30 L	((yawn)) wake up, second what do you do, you?

Here the use of Tamil is again initiated by learners. Louise wants to drill for pronunciation of “wake up” as part of the whole-class activity. Rajkumari has other ideas. She asks Vanita (across tables as they are different levels – Rajkumari is middle and Vanita top E1) what the meaning of “wake up” is (line 9), and Vanita glosses the meaning (lines 10, 11) and makes a contrast with “get up” (lines 13, 14). Rajkumari then asks for the spelling (line 15). The use of Tamil in this exchange can be contrasted with uses which are initiated by Louise; learners are more in control as they are asking for translations.

Although learners wait for an appropriate moment to sort out meaning (compare extract 4 in which Maya and Kareena talk about meaning at the beginning of the language practice), there is some contestation between learners and teacher over when talking about spelling is appropriate. Vanita's spelling of “wake up” (extract 8, lines 16 and 18) is interrupted by Louise, “don't worry about writing now, we'll do it in a minute, first speaking, then writing” (line 19). Her teaching/learning agenda at this moment is different from Vanita's and Rajkumari's. Despite Louise highlighting her own agenda, Vanita persists with her response to Rajkumari's question. Indeed, it would be rude to Rajkumari not to finish the spelling, and so Vanita restarts her spelling of “wake up” from the beginning (lines 22 and 23). Learners use L1 to take control of their own learning and decide what task they want to do. Louise sometimes gives up control: she waits until the spelling task is finished before moving the lesson on (line 24).

Let us summarise what we have been saying about extracts 3–8. Tamil has a pedagogic use which is recognised and valued by teacher and learners:

- The teacher provides learners with opportunities to explain concepts to one another (extract 3).
- During pair work learners organise the task, make it logical and perform it by using Tamil (extracts 4–7).
- During a whole class drill there are moments of contestation and accommodation; learners ask one another for the meaning and spelling of a word and this is done in spite of the teacher’s interruptions and “moving on” actions (extract 8).
- Throughout our data, learners use Tamil to provide explanations to each other, do repair work, clarify spelling. (In data not presented here learners make private comments about class activities, e.g. that they do not understand an aspect of the lesson.)
- There is, within the internal workings of classroom practices, a range of important uses of Tamil which support, elaborate and contest the main pedagogic track of the lessons. The teacher manages the tension between the use of Tamil as an explanatory resource and time pressures and sometimes this means she does not know how the learners are using Tamil.

### Closing analytic comments

We have described the resourcefulness of learners at both Green Dale and TRAG, the ways that they draw on and use their linguistic and interpersonal resources in classroom teaching and learning. Classroom practices at Green Dale are bound up with friendships and collaborations that cross classroom boundaries and these are sometimes drawn upon, invoked (and even produced) in classroom teaching and learning. In the TRAG classroom we have looked at the important role L1 plays in classroom practices.

However, there are interesting absences within the classrooms. In Green Dale lessons, despite the class being sited in a primary school and although the teacher makes class-school links (e.g. explaining official school letters), the learners themselves did not seem to bring up school-related themes during the observation period. The two learners who worked in the school also did not make connections between their work and their language learning in their interviews. At TRAG, although L1 was used as an occasional resource for language learning, there is a gap between language learning and TRAG’s other functions. In both settings there could be more integration of the classroom and the “just beyond” setting. The immediate setting (the primary school and the Tamil resource centre) remain elsewhere in the detailed interactions of classroom life.

In the next section we draw together some of the main issues from both classrooms and consider how these ways of using resources (and the gaps) relate to current curriculum-based accounts and concerns.

## Issues and implications

### Key themes

- In both classrooms, learner differences are actively drawn on and created to produce learning opportunities. Far from heterogeneity being a problem that has to be managed, it is a feature of classroom life which, if facilitated and supported by teacher and learners, transforms routine tasks into many-layered language use.
- Analysing this heterogeneity sheds light on the learners as active, complex beings – an identity which is often masked by the (usually unwitting) “infantilising” of ESOL classrooms. Learners, “abandoned to the clutches of the foreign language” (Canetti, 1976), are often positioned as child-like in the way in which they are taught (and indeed how language

learners feel when trying to communicate with limited resources).

- The complex social identities which learners bring to the class and which have the potential for being realised in the class are evident in:
  - Green Dale – where learners take the initiative to repair each other and draw in conceptual and interpersonal learning which goes beyond the restrictions of fast grammar packages and where creativity and humour are not just playing with language forms but are about managing social relations.
  - TRAG – where learners use Tamil to: be analytical about grammar; understand and manage the procedural aspects of the task and the logic of making it relevant to their lives; gloss words with examples.
- Much current debate is about assessing progress and moving on. But it may be as important with many ESOL learners, who are long term UK residents, to motivate them to continue to learn – perhaps even *maintain* their current competence in English as to expect marked improvement. If this is the case, then motivation to continue over a long period is crucial. Some of the Green Dale students have attended the class for over two years and one reason for this loyalty may well be that the classroom attends to their social identities as complex social beings; language learning and self-presentation go hand in hand.
- Our case study has described classroom practices which could be subsumed under the generic instructional strategies identified by Condelli as leading to language and literacy development: bringing the outside into the classroom, using students' first language and varied practice and interaction (2002). Condelli says that specific instructional practices and interactions between teacher and students need to be identified so that they can serve as variables in future experimental research (*ibid.* 31 and 32). Micro-ethnography can do much more than identify these variables; it can show us how learners and teachers together construct (and enter into a dialogue over) instructional practices and so offers something new to Condelli's mix of "professional wisdom and empirical evidence" (*ibid.* 31).
- Formal distinctions (heterogeneous versus homogeneous; community versus mainstream) start to break down when we look closely at actual practices. This is because the classroom is a communicative setting in its own right, not just a place for practice. Learners and teacher use resources that are to hand to not just to get through the lessons but make them "real". Making "real" means having something to say to one another as learners in *this* classroom doing *this* activity with *these* resources. What this means may be connected in highly mediated ways to available institutional categories (e.g. "refugee" and "community").

#### Issues related to the core curriculum and learning infrastructure

There is a gap between the language skills that we have seen learners actually drawing on and the linguistic descriptions available in the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. In particular, the section on "giving accounts" (DfEE, 2001, 112) when applied to our Green Dale data does not capture the collaborative nature of language-use: for example, we have seen how "making meanings clear" (*ibid.*) can happen in different ways. The Core Curriculum refers to L1 in the context of sample activities, e.g. as a resource for a group preparing to tell a story (DfEE, 113), and as a way of understanding sentence structure (DfEE, 147), but we do not know how to systematically and explicitly build L1 use into everyday classroom practices. So, we now make the following general points about how the Core Curriculum can be supplemented:

- In addition to sentence and text grammar we need other kinds of descriptions of language-use in social contexts (our interest in the linguistic aspects of repair and classroom use of L1 cannot be separated from our interest in their social purposes).
- Descriptions of classroom language-use can be integrated with the "sample activities" strand of the curriculum (e.g. how sequencing elements of an account can be done collaboratively and

how L1 can be used to perform tasks).

- Heterogeneity can be incorporated into some generic features of the Core Curriculum's "component skills and knowledge and understanding" (e.g. different perspectives on how, when and where "accuracy" matters and the ways L1 can be differently used).
- Components of the speaking and listening Core Curriculum – "speak to communicate", "engage in discussion", "listen and respond" – can be related to one another (e.g. learners are always mindful of who they are talking to and about in our data; L1 can be a resource for classroom participation and involvement).
- The use of L1 can be a resource for ILP's and other teaching/learning practices (e.g. eliciting learners' experiences and knowledge and engaging with this as part of a structured teaching/learning agenda explicitly addressed through tutor–learner negotiation); L1 can facilitate students' free production at low E1.
- In a recent evaluation of community ESOL classes it is said that having experienced bilingual staff and resources work well, but no account is given of the practices made possible by these staff and resources (Basic Skills Agency, 2002)<sup>7</sup>. A key recommendation is that there be trained bilingual staff (ibid, 31) and so a greater understanding of how L1 can be used in the classroom could be a significant element in this training and indeed in the training of monolingual staff as well. L1 is an empowering resource and does not belong on the margins of ESOL teaching/learning planning and practice.

### Methodological reflections

Throughout the fieldwork and afterwards, despite time constraints, we have tried to take account of the learners', teachers' and other participants' own accounts of the classroom practices we have been describing through:

- Building relationships with learners and tutor by working as co-tutor in the class, particularly at TRAG (although interaction was limited to class time).
- Explaining the nature and purposes of our research to learners and teachers; asking for comments on the research proposal, practice and report; incorporating amendments and suggestions (teachers said that they appreciated being told about the research and having a hands-on relationship to its evolution, but it is harder to say this about the students).
- Reflecting on particular classroom episodes and data extracts; getting feedback from students on interview data (at times it was hard to establish a shared language between interviewers and learners to talk about data extracts and to relate these to broader issues that concerned learners).
- Involving teachers and participants (a member of an Arab Community Association, Rania, and TRAG staff) in developing interview questions, interpreting during interviews, and doing translation (along the way decisions were made which raised many methodological questions whose solution could be explored in a longer project: What is the researcher's role in the interview to be? How is the language expert to be trained? How is the interviewer's "inside knowledge" to be taken into account in both the training and the analysis? What counts as a "good ethnographic interview" under such circumstances? How should translation be taken into account in the analysis?)

Our research methods challenge us not just to make our research questions relevant to the classroom participants but to be accountable to them for what we are saying.

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7. We thank Celine Castelino for drawing our attention to this work.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: transcription conventions

<u>stress</u>	stressed syllable
LOUD	loud speech
{ }	unclear speech
{ ( ) }	commentary on gesture or other relevant feature
hhhhh	laughter
?	end of tone unit: final rising tone
,	end of tone unit: slight final rise
.	end of tone unit: fall

### Appendix 2: Green Dale biographical information and perspectives on learning

Sana came from Pakistan to London 20 years ago and has been coming to the class for two and a half years. She is as an active networker and enabler, telling her friends about the courses she is doing (e.g. a maths class at the school and a computer class at the local college) and encouraging them to participate. For Sana learning is related to looking after and helping others: “One should always tell others about the good things that there are to learn”.

Nada came from Morocco about ten years ago and has been in the class for about two years, joining at the same time as Sana who she works with as a school meals supervisor. She also attends a computer class with Sana. Nada wants to be able to explain homework to her children (and not to have to rely on her husband and neighbours to help them) and would like eventually to work as a classroom assistant (which she has done at the school on a voluntary basis). She describes learning English as “sticking up for / defending yourself”; after many years of social isolation, she says: “I wanted something for myself, some vocation for myself, not looking after the kids and doing the housework and looking after my husband but something for me”.

Fatma came from the Sudan five years ago and has been coming to the class for about nine months. She has tried to go to classes at the local college but found child care a problem so had to stop. Fatma has a different view of the relationship between work and study to Nada: her studies (at university in the Sudan) have been interrupted and she is going through a “transitional period because my kids are young”: “my aim is set on learning first and foremost,

therefore I would like to study more than anything else”.

Rania sees herself as a counsellor as well as a teacher: “there is more going on in the classroom than just learning” (extract from interviewer’s notes). For Rania the academic track of the lesson is not smooth because of the contexts of her learners’ lives: they come to class with personal problems and distractions and she must take account of these in her teaching. Moreover, she empathises with the learners’ lives and circumstances: she has been a second language learner and refugee herself and sees teaching as a vocation.

### **Appendix 3: TRAG biographical information and perspectives on learning**

Rajkumari is 31 and has been living in the UK for three years. She studied English until the age of 15 in Sri Lanka. She has some English and can read and form letters. Her level is mid-E1. She shares a house with Maya, one of the other learners on the TRAG course. In Sri Lanka she was an accountant for the *Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*, for which her first husband also worked before he was killed. She used to work as a sandwich maker with Maya’s partner but has been unemployed for the last three months. Her future plans are to study and get a part time job, preferably working in a shop. At the moment Rajkumari’s immigration status is uncertain. She has not as yet received exceptional leave to remain in the country, though her son has been provided with this. Her case is being appealed.

Maya is 29 and has been in the UK for five months. She studied in a Tamil medium school until she was 16 but was not taught English. She has learnt the English alphabet and has a special interest in writing in English. She has not been employed in the UK and has decided to improve her English before thinking about future plans. She gives a stark example of the impact of not being able to read English: “When I received the letter of rejection from the home office, I found somebody to read it. They read it and said to me that it accepted my asylum application. I only realised what had happened when I received the second letter saying that I had to sign-in at the police station, but it was then too late to re-appeal.”

The teacher, Louise, is a mother tongue English speaker, well qualified in EFL with wide experience of teaching in the UK and overseas. Louise uses a range of different materials adapted to the needs of the students. She is particularly concerned about the diversity of her students and the inappropriateness of many eurocentric textbooks. She feels that the most important task is to learn from the rich and varied culture provided by the learners and so create materials and approaches that meet their ever changing needs. This diversity and the inevitably different pace at which they learn conflicts with an “outcome” based delivery model of teaching where specified objectives should be met at the end of a session. She says:

“Students are very reticent to talk and give opinions. This is difficult (a) from the point of view of course design and knowing what they really want to do, and (b) from classroom management perspectives – how to draw them out. ... (I will be) trying to build up some group dynamics and a culture where students are not afraid to speak out ... I think I have got my work cut out!! I’m taking quite a structural, formal approach as I think (a) this is what students are used to, and (b) lots of modelling and drilling will get them talking and hearing their own voices in English.”

## Case study three - Numeracy and ESOL

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### Bilingual Students Learning in ESOL and Numeracy Classes: a contrastive case study of classroom diversity

Mike Baynham, Shelly Whitfield

#### Introduction

This study investigates the pedagogies and practices in culturally and linguistically diverse ESOL and Numeracy classrooms, addressing the following questions:

- i Are there distinctive differences in the ways that cultural and linguistic diversity is experienced and managed by both teachers and students in the ESOL and Numeracy classrooms?
- ii Are there lessons to be learnt from one environment which can profitably inform the other?

Also, this case study sheds light on some cultural differences in ESOL and Numeracy in fields of professional practice, giving rise to a further question:

- iii Do the data generated from the case study contribute to our understanding of cultural differences in ESOL and Numeracy as fields of professional practice in ways that can be useful to both teachers and students in such programmes?

Five teachers and over 20 ESOL students participated in the study at three different centres in a large multi-site college. The teachers have varying degrees of professional experience and training. The classes and the teachers are as follows:

- East Centre: ESOL Numeracy taught by Sally and Return to Learn for Numeracy taught by Cathy
- West Centre: full-time ESOL classes (2 different sessions) taught by Steve and Karen
- North Centre: ESOL class taught by Ruth

The students attending these classes come from a wide range of countries including Angola, Pakistan, Bosnia, Greece, Venezuela, India, China, Iran, Iraq, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Syria and Turkey. Many hold diplomas, degrees, or certifications from their respective countries. Other students, whose educations were disrupted, wish to continue with their studies, eventually hoping to attend universities or technical colleges.

**Methodology:** The case study adopted a 'rich', thick description methodology, drawing not just on audio-recorded classroom data, but also on participant observation, field notes, student and teacher accounts of the teaching and learning activities through interviews, collection of teaching materials and students' work, attempting to build up a richly documented account of what is going on in the classrooms. Each class was observed at least six times, with the exception of the Return to Learn class which was observed three times in order to



supplement observations in the ESOL numeracy class. From these six observations, three class sessions were audio-recorded, again with the exception of the numeracy classes due to student discomfort with recording in these classes.

## Context

The classes that took part in this study have distinct characteristics, reflecting the needs of the students they serve. However, what all the classes have in common is that they 'feel' like safe and welcoming places to come and learn. This is reinforced by the dedication of the teachers who participated in the study, reflected in their interactions with students. We hope the following vignettes show the subtle differences of the centres and classes, as well as the varying pedagogical approaches of the teachers.

### East Centre ESOL numeracy class

ESOL numeracy starts at 9.30 a.m., one of the earliest classes offered at the Centre. Just before that time, little children are scurrying down the hall, with mothers following closely behind, trying to steer them into the creche so they can get to their morning classes on time. Sally arrives early and prepares for her small class, pushing tables together to the middle of the room, setting out the flipchart and stacking the handouts in neat piles.

Usually a little after 9.30 a.m., students start arriving one by one. Sally always greets them with a smile and rather than jumping into the lesson, she begins by talking with them. "That is a beautiful collar, Nasreen. Did you sew it yourself?" Her relaxed approach eases students into the maths work that will be done, while giving them time to prepare for the day's class. It also gives the other students time to arrive before direct instruction on a new topic begins.

The class numbers have fluctuated since January; however, Nasreen from Pakistan, Leah and Sara, sisters from Angola, are the three regular students, who show up usually every week. They are hard-working, dedicated students, as seen from their organised folders, meticulous notes, and completed homework. Sally usually begins maths work by checking over homework assignments, one-to-one. "Right, we're looking to mark some work first." This gives students a chance to review concepts, from the previous class. It also is a chance to answer any questions, clear up any confusions and give the students some immediate success. One of the main objectives of this class is to specifically prepare ESOL students for the Numeracy tests, focusing on improving the English necessary to be able to succeed on the tests.

"Do you want to look at some fractions?" Sally asks the class. She often introduces new topics with this polite question. "Let's just have a look." After she has explained a concept on the flipchart, she and the students work some problems out together. Then a handout is distributed so students can practice the new concept individually. "Right, have a look at this sheet now." Sally will clarify any language that might be confusing on the handout, but often students understand the assignment. Sally accommodates the handouts for her ESOL students, sometimes cutting out some of the text and re-copying a worksheet or using handouts that have simple language.

After about an hour, students get a 15 minute break; however, they usually stay in the class and keep working. Sometimes they'll grab a snack in the coffee bar, but quickly return and begin to work on handouts. On some occasions, students may chat with one another, but this

is usually done quietly and in their first language. Other times students from Sara's English class will come to the door and say "hi", which she returns with a smile, but does not leave the room to talk with them.

For the most part, the two hours pass quickly and quietly. Students spend most of their time completing handouts individually and checking over work and asking/answering questions with Sally. During one class session, students cover many concepts from basic shape geometry to reducing fractions, taking special care with the language of numbers.

### **East Centre Return to Learn**

In the Maths Room, Return to Learn begins at 1.00 p.m. Leah and Sara, the only ESOL students in the class, walk over from their English class to attend the session with Cathy. June and Deirdre come over from the coffee bar where they've just visited with friends – sometimes playing quiz games – and watching over their children before sending them off to the creche. Tara is always on time, carrying in her usual coke and candy bar.

The room is dimly lit – only half of the lights illuminated – because it is hard for some students to work in a bright room with their dyslexia. Cathy greets the women, checking on how they are doing. "How are you feeling, Deirdre? You're looking better." Deirdre has just had surgery and is on a new medication that makes her very tired.

Return to Learn gives the students a chance to work on maths and get one-to-one tutoring in a relaxed atmosphere. Cathy creates such an environment, accommodating her students with overlays, coloured paper, reading aloud, enlarging print and most importantly, with her kind and patient nature. She understands that her students are juggling many demands of life and sometimes their classes are the safest place for them. She stays busy the entire time, rotating from student to student, giving them handouts, checking over work and lending a listening ear when needed.

However, the students also run the pace of the class. Often June helps Deirdre with her maths work, re-explaining a concept or checking over her work. In return when June gets stuck on a tedious division or multiplication problem, Deirdre calms her down with, "Let me see it for minute. Take a breath and I'll see what I come up with." Tara likes to work alone, usually in a corner space by a window. Leah and Sara work together and individually. Over the past six months, they have begun to communicate more with the other students as they've become more confident with English. Cathy works with them like the rest of the students – not slowing down her speech – and is very perceptive in reading their faces since language is limited. "I can see that you don't like it", she says in regards to estimation, a concept Leah and Sara did not enjoy linguistically, as well as mathematically. "Do you know what estimation means? It's guessing, approximating, saying something is about..." Sara replies, "It's complicated." Even though Cathy offers her students choices, she knows when to challenge them. "Shall we do a bit more on estimation?" Leah replies, "No." "Let's just do these few more estimation problems, and then we'll move on." Leah and Sara later joke that estimation is good to learn in order to balance their modest budget, as well as help them on the path to becoming a petroleum engineer and lawyer.

For the most part, the class works quietly. Everyone going at their own pace, moving through activities that prepare them for the exams coming up.

### West Centre full-time ESOL class

The coffee bar is usually buzzing around 12:30 p.m. with students talking over lunch, while teachers are making a beeline for the copying machine. By 1:00 p.m. the crowds have thinned and the buzz continues upstairs in the ESOL full-time course where students are debating issues in small groups ranging from the Iraq conflict to hair highlights. Class has not started yet. This is what they do – talk. Approximately 15 students are assessed and selected for the full-time course where they meet everyday, attending classes taught by Karen and Steve. Needless to say, they become a tight-knit group, sometimes working as a team, mixing as friends, because language learning is their work.

On Wednesday, Karen walks in and before her folders hit the desk, Naji has a question for her. “Ah, yes, Naji, give me a second and we’ll discuss that with everyone.” She usually opens the class by asking everyone to share something about the week or to describe something they learned in Steve’s class. While they talk she corrects tenses or writes new vocabulary on the board. During this opening session students navigate the course of learning, offering unexpected topics, jokes and advice to one another. Karen “quite like[s] the randomness, the challenge to take something somebody says, somebody asks about and to use it to teach.” And she does that very well, taking their questions seriously and wanting to offer them a clear explanation. Sometimes their questions are difficult, like explaining the usage rule of ‘interested’ versus ‘interesting’ or clarifying the subtext underneath the question “When you bring the kids over, could you give them a bath first?” Mariam wants to know what her neighbour meant by ‘could you’.

But even for all this “randomness”, the class is guided by a *Language in Use* course book where in one class session, students begin with picture talk and finish a unit with listening and writing exercises. These activities are interrupted by a break at 2:00 p.m. when students move away from their desks to the side of the classroom that has chairs and sofas. Tea is made, the biscuit tin is opened and the buzz is back in the classroom.

The class is large in number and diverse in nature. Students are at Entry Level 2/3. Mainly labelled as refugees and asylum seekers. They come from around the world, usually carrying a tragic story inside: Mariam is a young mother, waiting for her husband to be released from prison in Ethiopia; Hafiz is a father and husband from Afghanistan who has recently found hope in Leeds after being tortured in his own country and then harassed in his first Home Office placement in Glasgow. Naji is a biology teacher from Iraq who cannot learn English fast enough because he’s “not a little boy” and wants to earn his PhD. Nurdin and Mira are from Iran, but didn’t meet and marry until they came to Britain. They’re expecting their first child in September. Sharon has been in England for ten years, having escaped from China in the 1960s after swimming through the currents to reach Hong Kong before finding her way to Europe. Marwan, a father and husband, is a political reporter from Syria, who travels to London to debate the issues about the Iraq conflict for TV and radio. Hisham, a young man from Afghanistan, hopes to be completing his basic computer programming courses by this time next year.

### North Centre: ESOL – a community approach

Ruth is always in the classroom well before I arrive. It is a light, airy classroom in a sprawling one story complex of buildings, set in parkland just inside the Ring Road. Many students with special learning difficulties use this college and in fact two of the women attending the ESOL classes have teenage children with quite severe disabilities who attend classes at the same time. She is talking to the students who arrive one by one, looking at work, discussing their

individual learning plans. The age range of the students is from mid-20s to 60s. Jaya from India arrives with Sophia from Greece, they have made friends through the classes and talk to each other regularly on the phone through the week. Sophia gives Jaya a lift to classes. Ahmet from Bosnia is scouring the newspaper for information about the performance of Leeds United. Leeds in particular and soccer in general, is his passion. Despite the age range, virtually all the students are parents or indeed grandparents. For some, reading and writing in English is a problem; all have a knowledge of English derived from their years spent in England yet a lack of confidence in stringing together utterances and holding conversations. In terms of the National Curriculum. They are Entry Level Two with spiky profiles. Over the year students have got to know each other and formed connections and networks that persist outside the class. The fact, for example, that Sophia and Jaya will talk on the phone and visit each other though the week seems to be an important “non-linguistic” outcome of the class. The students have a diverse range of ambitions including being able to chat to neighbours, communicate with grandchildren and support their teenage children with special learning difficulties.

### **Main analytic focus**

In this section, we review the main analytical issues that have come out of the study in relation to our research questions.

#### **Cultural differences between ESOL and numeracy classes?**

One of the issues we wanted to address in this case study was whether there was any evidence of cultural differences between adult ESOL and adult numeracy classes. In addition to considering this in relation to the observations themselves, data from field notes and teacher interviews are relevant here. One of the adult numeracy tutors for example talks about the tendency in adult ESOL for students to work in a group with students at the same level, whereas adult numeracy work is typically one to one with some group work interspersed. How true is this for our data? While the formulation of ESOL = group work and adult numeracy = individual work is quite an oversimplification, in that one-to-one work plays a part in ESOL classes and group work features in numeracy classes, the data we collected suggested that the numeracy classes we observed did have a preponderance of activities which meant students were working on their own or in loosely networked groups.

We carried out an ‘episode analysis’ of the adult numeracy classes, using a classroom discourse analysis framework developed by Jay Lemke (Lemke, 1989), which takes as a key analytic unit the episode seen as a bounded sequence, signalled by opening and closing. Of 45 episodes noted in the six observations of the adult numeracy class, 32 involved the students working individually. In one of the adult ESOL classes, we noted 12 episodes of which ten were whole group, one involved pair work and the other individual work. We conclude that the evidence from the classrooms we visited supports the idea that for the adult ESOL class, group work is the primary mode of teaching and learning while in the adult numeracy class it has a less central role. We will, however, argue below that there are interesting and subtle differences in the nature of group work in adult ESOL and adult numeracy classes, which we would argue go to the heart of what is distinctive about adult ESOL and adult numeracy pedagogy.

#### **Episode structures in an adult numeracy class**

To illustrate some of the issues raised in an episode analysis, we will briefly consider episode

structure in adult numeracy classes. Episodes are bounded classroom discourse units, marked by both linguistic features signalling opening and closing/transition as well as topic shifts. Openings are often marked by items like “well”, “right”, “so”, “o.k.”.

Openings and closings play a key role in the textual organisation of the lesson. The teacher marks boundaries, signals that one activity (say pre-lesson informal chatting) is closing down and another (for example the introductory phase of the lesson itself) is opening up. It is interesting to look at the **reference** involved in openings. The teacher may refer the group back to something that happened in a previous lesson or lesson episode, as in

*have you got your other fractions that you did last week?*

This reference across lessons creates an **intertextuality**, understood as the relationship across a series of “lesson texts”, so that we begin to see the relationships set up between whole sequences of lessons, for example when here a teacher refers back to something done in a previous episode or indeed lesson.

While openings refer back, their main function of course is to refer forward to what the next topic/activity/episode is going to be.

*today, today, we're going to, nuh, we're going to move in, we're moving into a new section*

The tense choice of “going to” explicitly projects the listener forward in time.

Here is an example of the opening of an episode in one of the adult numeracy classes in this current study:

*Episode Five. Introduces a new activity just before the break with a pink worksheet on Figuring out Number Patterns*

*T: Alright girls ... are we ready? ... Shall we just start something else before you have your break? (Hands out worksheet) Use the difference to work out the pattern ...*

*S: What does pattern mean?*

*Pattern means the unit how it's going up ... if you have this, it's going up by two each time and that's the pattern. Pattern is also ... have you come across a pattern before? You've got a pattern and the jumper pattern is a design, but in maths pattern is a sequence. And you spot the pattern there (POINTS) in 3s it's going up by 3 each time. You could do this to show it's going up by three each time.*

Discussions with adult ESOL teachers also suggested other interesting cultural differences both within the adult ESOL field and between adult ESOL and other basic skills provision such as numeracy. One of the adult ESOL teachers commented on a perception that the emphasis on ILPs was something driven by a basic skills agenda which emphasises individual student learning at the expense of the group processes typical of adult ESOL classes. Another of the ESOL teachers commented on discussions with other basic skills tutors on differentiation and group work. It may be that in other basic skills classes differentiation is typically achieved through worksheets at different levels. The ESOL teacher here felt that non specialists often

fail to appreciate the role of spoken language in differentiating between students and managing a mixed level group. Issues such as these merit further investigation.

### **Group and pair work in the ESOL and numeracy classes**

In Karen's ESOL class, group work – as a class – is the primary form of teaching and learning. Almost all activities such as picture talk, vocabulary review, grammar and usage instruction is carried out through class discussion. Formal pair work – as a speaking exercise – was organized once in the six observations. Informal pair work – like helping each other with applications and reading over sentences – occurred at least once during most class sessions.

#### **Examples of group and pair work**

Pair talk: *For 15 minutes, students are asked to describe education in their respective countries to their partner as Karen comes around to listen.*

Group talk: Karen: *Tell me what happen this morning in Steve's class. From here, all students contribute to her question, but also make jokes, interrupt one another, and digress from the question. [In the ESOL class talk is work.]*

In the adult numeracy class, group work is seen as a time where students can help each other; however, this doesn't mean they necessarily have to talk with one another. Spoken interaction is much looser, less regulated than in the ESOL classes, where students might be deliberately grouped into twos or fours. Students are asked to complete an activity together or listen together to direct instruction. Group work in the adult numeracy classroom is more reminiscent of the social organisation of a work group, where participants get on with the work in hand and talk is incidental. In the ESOL classroom as we noted earlier, the talk is the work. As an organised activity, group work occurred twice during the six observations of the adult numeracy classroom, during the 29 January and 11 March observations. On 28 January, students were asked to place words underneath a mathematical symbol. However, as students did this, very little talk was necessary. On practice test day (11 March), when students completed the exams, they were asked to look over answers together. Group work defined as "working out a problem together" involves more student-tutor interaction than student-student interaction. This occurred in all six observations.

#### **Examples of numeracy group work**

Class discussion (28 Jan ): Sally: *Can you pick out and tell me what it mean?* Sara: *Ascending* Sally: *What does that mean?* Sara: *Is going up.*

*"Maths Language I Can Use" handout –*

Sally: *Anything you can say about these words? Write a sentence using the words on the top half.* H: *The stone is heavy.* (11 Mar.)

### **Individual work**

There are, in addition, interesting differences in the uses of individual work in both ESOL and Numeracy classes:

In the ESOL classes, individual work was focused, quiet time for students to do tasks like completing or filling in sentences, constructing new sentences, or answering questions or

making notes based on a listening exercise. Products of individual work are then usually shared and discussed with the entire class. Out of the six observations, individual work took place usually once during each class session. Students were given approximately 5 – 15 minutes (depending on the activity). Basically, individual work gives students time to construct something they can share during class discussion that follows. They are also prepared with an answer or response when the teacher calls on them.

### **Examples of individual work**

Listening Exercise (29 January, pg. 9 field notes): Karen: *I'm going to play you a cassette about the stories about near accidents. See if you can tell me the story that matches the picture. I suggest you make note to try and remember.*

Fill-in Exercise (5 February, pg. 7): *Students are asked to fill in sentences.*

\_\_\_\_\_ ***is more crowded than Britain.***

Writing Sentences (2 April, pg. 4): *School Report: Students write sentences describing the subjects they were good at in school.*

In the adult numeracy classroom individual work is focused time where students can practice a mathematical concept or skill just learned or that needs to be reviewed. Individual work (usually done through handouts) is checked by the tutor as soon as a student has completed the assignment. Other students may be working on the same handout, but not necessarily. Some students work independently on other math topics (For example, Pyan is working on higher-level maths, some students make shapes while others complete a fraction handout). Out of the six observations, individual work took place in every class session. Individual work is the primary activity in class and usually follows a 10–15 minute direct instruction session from the tutor, particularly with new concepts. The typical instruction pattern looks like the following:

Tutor introduces ratio with definitions and sample problems – class works some problems together – students work on assignment individually – tutor checks work upon completion.

### **Examples of individual work in Adult Numeracy**

Shape Work (25 February): *Sally has Sara point out faces, edges, and vertices. She begins Leah on Handout #2.*

Practice Tests (11 March): *Students complete practice tests individually.*

### **Group, pair and individual work in the adult ESOL and numeracy classes**

As we have seen, group work was the main form of teaching and learning organisation in the adult ESOL classrooms, while in the adult numeracy classrooms it was very infrequent. Individual work occurred in both, and was generally quiet time for completing an activity. However, in the adult ESOL classroom, this typically led on to group work, while in the adult numeracy classrooms the teacher would more typically interact with the students one by one. Oral language group interaction was organised in the adult ESOL classroom, while in the adult numeracy classroom it occurred in a more spontaneous, less regulated way, as talk accompanying action. The adult ESOL teachers made use of structured pair work, involving a

pre-prepared task, in every class as well as informal ad hoc pairing of students to compare notes on their answers to an activity for example. In the adult numeracy classroom pair work did not occur as a structured pedagogical routine, but students might informally compare notes on the activity they were engaged in. In some ways student interaction seems less regulated in the adult numeracy classrooms.

### ESOL and EFL

In addition to the differences between the adult ESOL and numeracy classes some other interesting differences occurred. These relate to the positioning of adult ESOL in relation to mainstream Teaching English as a Foreign Language, to issues around the use of a coursebook and the central role of teacher designed materials using eclectic selections of resource materials tailored to the student's needs. Our discussions with ESOL teachers suggested strongly divergent views on this issue.

### ESOL and the curriculum

The introduction of the adult ESOL core curriculum was taking place over the period the study was conducted, leading to a further differentiation in the field between those who critique/resist the curriculum and those who support it. Cathy is a comparatively new ESOL teacher who has, however, been through the shift to a National Curriculum in the Primary sector:

*C: I've also obviously just arrived at a time when the National Curriculum has come out and ILPs and stuff. Now for me, I haven't seen them as a change, but I've just arrived with them so I've got used to them. The only thing that I can see is I went through primary schools and my training in primary schools at a time when the government introduced the National Curriculum to primary schools and we had things called IEPs which Individual Education Plans or Programs. O.K. So I can see a lot of parallels, definitely, to the kind of changes that are going on and in one sense I hope the changes are smoother than they were perhaps in primary schools. I can understand that if you've been teaching and doing things in a certain way for a long time that big, big changes can take a lot of adjusting to. And in one sense, I've just arrived with the change. I haven't got to adjust very much.*

*S: So you haven't felt more burdened now?*

*C: I haven't because partly because ... partly because of what's happened and partly because being through primary I've been used to kind of matching ... having a National Curriculum and the whole all the issues to do with that how to ... accessing things, you know, the idea that auditors and inspectors will be around and to keep (please align the rest of this) records and all that kind of stuff became a really, really big thing in primary. Perhaps it went too far the other way. I personally think the pendulum swung too far and a lot of teachers left. Maybe I shouldn't say that on tape (laughing). And so for me, no, it hasn't been a big deal, but I can see how it is for some people who haven't had, you know, haven't had ... to deal with all these changes.*

### Adult ESOL: interaction of teaching and learning activities with students' lives

*Conversation with Hyunsuk on the bus (Hyunsuk is helping as a volunteer in the North Centre class) She alludes to the differences between EFL courses (She is doing one at the college) and the ESOL classes she is observing. In EFL the teacher is "teaching for the exam," while in ESOL there is much more involvement in students' daily lives. (Field notes)*



According to the teachers we spoke to, the profile of ESOL students was seen to have shifted in recent years, with a shift away from students from more settled communities to newly arrived asylum seekers and newly settled refugees. This has also affected the educational profile of ESOL students. With a range of educational backgrounds, there may be more of a demand for structured fast track courses which blur traditional distinctions between ESL and EFL. This contrast came out in the classes we visited: The North Centre class, in a leafy college setting on the outskirts of the city, is a part time class with a community feel, whose students are either settled refugees or long term residents of the U.K. In the inner city full time course at West Centre in contrast, the students are, in the main, asylum seekers, living in hostels and bearing the brunt of the current procedures for the granting of asylum. As well as accounts of disruption, dislocation and trauma in leaving their countries, interviews with students contain accounts of the daily detail of being an asylum seeker. In a narrative which describes his leaving Afghanistan, crossing Europe and asking for asylum in England, Hafiz describes the moves with his family from Kent to London to Glasgow then to his present home:

*And they took us and bring us to immigration in the city Kent – near to France. And we was about one year in hotel ... Hampstead Hotel. And then after that, they send the list from immigration and give us flat in Scotland.*

S: *In Scotland?*

H: *In Glasgow and they sent us after one month to Glasgow. We were about seven month in Glasgow and the situation of Glasgow is very bad. . After that, I make decision and went to refugee council and told them I came to U.K. to save my life, now I want to kill myself. Please change my place. Send me another city, please – any city. Just I want to save my life because I have wife and my kids. I don't want to lose them. He told for me which city you chose ... prefer? I told him I don't know because I've never been in England. But what do you think? If you think another city ... Nottingham or Leeds? Good, fine, send me there. They told for me it is up to you. I choose just like this (randomly pointing) Leeds; it's o.k. They send me to Leeds. I give flat key to receptionist and told them I want to leave the flat. You can check the flat. Everything is o.k. I want to go. And they give me permission to leave and I come to Leeds. At that time my wife was pregnant and my son nearly two ...*

S: *So your wife was with you and your two-year old son?*

H: *My daughter ... my daughter was there ... my son not born ... my wife was pregnant. The city council housing advice centre in the City Centre they help us a lot because my wife was pregnant and we had one child. They told for us we send you to hostel for few days maybe few months, but not up to us. We'll find you house inside the Leeds. You have to choose one part of Leeds where you want to live. And that time the city ... how the city there was lot of people and two people were from Afghanistan. And I went to them and ask, "Hello, how are you? I want to find good area. I want to live near city centre because I'm disabled. I can't go outside of Leeds. Where do you prefer because you know about Leeds you live before." They told for me if you want near the city centre ... everywhere ... Hyde Park area is good area or Rosley Road or Little London. I choose Hyde Park and we went to hostel about two months we were in hostel. And the hostel people was lovely people. One worker was ... name is C. She is still our friend now. She visit us all the time and she find after ... uh ... last year ... after Christmas ... find us*

*house in Hyde Park. First choice we got this house. We were very lucky. We come to here last January 14th of January this house.*

S: *Just this January?*

H: *Last year ... not this January.*

S: *So you've been there a little over a year.*

The lives of these students are in flux and issues and crises interrupt the pre-planned lesson: one of the ESOL teacher's skills, as Karen suggested above, is to turn these into learning opportunities, creating the "safe" environment mentioned earlier where students can learn in a disrupted, rapidly changing and often violent environment. The following excerpt shows how a student's external circumstance that interrupts the class, is turned into a learning experience by both teacher and students during the typical opening conversational episode where students are asked to share something about their week.

*Class is beginning and Karen opens the session by asking the students to share something about their week. Fatimeh begins by explaining and then telling a joke she heard the day before.*

F: *Yesterday Haroun he told us comic things.*

T: *Comic things?*

F: *Yes*

T: *Oh, o.k.*

Sh: *Co-mic things.*

[Cell phone rings]

J: *It's emergency.*

T: *O.k., o.k., o.k., outside then.*

J: *Hello?* [Jade leaves the classroom.]

J: *I'm o.k. I'm just upset about this surgery.*

T: *This?*

J: *Surgery ... surgery for doctor. This place is for hom ... homeless.*

T: *Homeless people?*

J: *Yes. Where I live so I have to got to that place. This place very strange. They told me they open morning ten o'clock finish twelve o'clock. After that afternoon between three o'clock to four o'clock. Yeah? I have two ... three times gone to there after two o'clock*

*and have no doctor in there! And also because I told them I have to go to school, yeah? But doctor only work in the morning. But they told me open afternoon. What point with open afternoon? I want prescription but my doctor say I have to see him. I don't want to see him. I want prescription (crying).*

*T: Yeah, but in England you can't have prescription without seeing the doctor, unless it's a repeat.*

*J: No! This kind of pill ... this kind of pill, yeah?*

*T: The pills ...*

*J: Sometimes they give you only before, so now I say I want to change surgery to some place else.*

*T: Somewhere else?*

*J: So doctor call me now and I say I want. She say yeah for me, so now I'll come this afternoon.*

*T: O.K., so they've organized it now for you?*

*J: Yeah, because they don't open in afternoon ... very strange. They told me earlier appointment ten o'clock in the morning.*

*SH: (overlapping) They always take half day. Wednesday always take afternoon off.*

*T: I don't know.*

*J: So I go some place else. Some place open all day so I get two doctor now.*

*T: O.K. I've got two doctors now. You've got two doctors now. Oh, well.*

*C: Post office every Wednesday afternoon is closed. This is very traditional English, you know?*

*T: We used to have what was called half day closing.*

*SH: Yeah, half day closing ... (overlapping other voices) half day.*

*N: You need at the office ... uh ... you need write time tables what time open.*

*T: Yeah.*

*J: I've been there three o'clock and I have no one inside.*

*SH: Yeah, it is. You know it doesn't matter half day closing need when don't close.*

*T: Yeah, well at least you've got it sorted.*

*J: Oh, o.k.*

In the previous activity, the structure is open where it makes it easy for students and teacher to use the experiences brought into the classroom for language learning. Karen now moves the students on into a more routine and structured activity in the workbook, where they will discuss pictures depicting accidents. However, Karen and her students still use outside experiences to inform and contextualise the language practice inside the classroom. Sometimes this is initiated by the students and at other times it is directly prompted by Karen.

T: *Good. We're in our workbook, o.k.? Um ... have a look, have a look at the first part. It's page 56, Unit 12 titled 'Accidents' and there are some strange pictures. Alright?*  
 [laughter by students as they look at the pictures] *Some strange pictures. Oh, dear. The first picture ... alright ...*

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T: *O.K. Oh, dear ... oh, dear! Anybody done ... anybody ever fallen over on a banana skin before?*

SH: *Yeah!*

T: *Has that ever happened? Yes?*

SH: *On watermel ... (laughs) ... watermelon.*

T: *Tell me. Watermelon?*

SH: *Suddenly, I sing a song and whuhhh ... .*

T: *I was singing. Oh, dear, you fell over.*

J: *Where in street?*

T: *Where was that – in the street?*

SH: *Yeah.*

T: *Oh, dear.*

Here the topic introduced by the teacher, Slipping on a Banana, is immediately appropriated by Sharon who transforms it into an anecdote about Slipping on a Watermelon. The teacher reacts contingently and encourages Sharon to develop her anecdote. Then Rafiq the class joker joins the conversation and a humorous, fantasy exchange takes place between Rafiq, the teacher, Soraya, another Iranian student and other students:

R: *In Iran banana it's bad custom ... in Iran.*

T: *It's a bad custom to fall over or to eat them?*

R: *No, to eat them.*

T: *To eat bananas, why? It's bad to eat bananas?*

S: *What?*

R: *Ask Soraya.*

J: *It's a very cheap.*

S: *I have one suggestion.*

T: *Yes?*

S: *When he speak – for example –*

T: (interrupting) *When he speaks*

S: *When he speaks 100 words just you believe one.*

[Class laughs]

J: *I want to go your country, very cheap.*

T: *Rafiq, when we listen to you, we have a very strange picture of Iran.*

R: *No* [class laughs again].

T: *Gosh, you can't eat bananas, you ...*

R: *No ... no ... we eat it with the skin.*

T: *You eat it with the skin.*

R: *Yeah.*

T: *O.K.*

R: *It's very delicious.*

T: *Is it good?*

R: *It's very delicious.*

S: *No ... no because when you pay money then you pay money for a skin.*

T: *Ah! You buy the skin.*

S & M: *Yes.*

The teacher allows the conversation to run on, but in the end brings it back to the focus of the activity she is trying to set up:

T: *Yeah ... so alright. You've never fallen over on a banana skin though?*

S: *No.*

Humour and fantasy seemed to be another important way for students to take part in the teaching and learning activities. Often this seemed to take the lesson off its planned course, yet the skill of the teacher is to react contingently to student contributions which take the course of the lesson off in another direction, gently but robustly bringing the group back to the topic at a suitable moment.

In the following section we see another way in which the course book activity on accidents is contextualised, drawing on Mariam's experience as parent of a small baby. Here the focus is on the danger of a baby playing with matches:

T: *What do you think ... what do you think happens next? What do you think is the accident or the problem or the bad luck?*

M: *He can't make light cause he's yo ... maybe he eats it.*

T: *Ah, o.k. Maybe he eats it. Maybe he ate it. Yeah?*

M: *He can't light.*

T: *Maybe that's too difficult for the baby, yeah. Maybe it is too difficult. O.K. Good.*

N: *Maybe choke*

T: *Sorry?*

N: *Maybe he choke.*

T: *Maybe he choked.*

J: *Maybe make a fire.*

T: *Maybe if he's strong. Mariam, doesn't think he can. You don't think he can manage.*

M: *Yes, because C. (Mariam's daughter) should help one year.*

T: *She is one.*

M: *Yes ma'am, but she can't.*

T: *Ah, she can't do that. It's quite difficult for a youngster.*

M: *Yeah.*

N: *But if he eats it, what ... what happens? Where must go the fire?*

T: *If he eats it, who knows. Who knows, but it's up to you to decide.*

The invented world of the course material is constantly reappropriated and recontextualised by the students, either in terms of their life experience or through humorous verbal play. The teacher lets these interactions run, aware presumably that the students in doing so are

contributing to the overall objectives of the lesson by communicating in English.

#### *Supporting both fluency and accuracy*

In the ESOL classrooms we observed there were many examples of activities designed to develop fluency as well as those designed to develop accuracy. The extract we have looked at above has a focus on fluency, yet we can see evidence of the teacher's efforts, through reformulating moves to develop students' grammatical awareness:

N: *Maybe choke*

T: *Sorry?*

N: *Maybe he choke.*

T: *Maybe he choked.*

#### **Linguistic and cultural issues in adult numeracy classes**

*Class starts at approximately 9:30, but students arrive at different times depending on transportation, child care, weather, etc. Sally and I set up the room while she explains how one of the main goals of this class is to focus on working to improve English necessary for the students to be able to do the National Tests. Many students' math abilities may be well beyond what the exam mathematically tests, but these same students have difficulty with the language on the test – what the test is asking for them to do. (From field notes)*

We have seen how in the adult ESOL classes linguistic and cultural knowledge and practices are the curriculum, talk as we have suggested is core classroom work. How do these issues play out in adult numeracy classrooms? Everything we know about situated learning suggests that linguistic and cultural knowledge and practices are central to all sites of learning, yet here the focus is on another kind of knowledge and practices: those of core basic mathematics, number, space, etc. So how do linguistic and cultural issues impinge? How prepared are adult numeracy teachers for the issues of linguistic and cultural diversity posed by these classrooms? In this section we will review how our classroom observations and discussions with teachers and students highlight issues of linguistic and cultural diversity in the adult numeracy classrooms we visited. We will do this in relation to a specific aspect of the National Curriculum, the National Tests in Numeracy.

The students in the adult numeracy classes we visited were preparing for the National Test in adult numeracy. There was widespread recognition that their maths capability far outstripped their knowledge of English, hence the need for specialised classes in ESOL numeracy or numeracy for ESOL students. This perception was matched in the classes we observed, where the range of mathematical knowledge in some students seemed to stretch up to around "A" Level. Yet their language was holding them back and banding them in a level that was far below them in terms of their maths. This is the problematic of these students and the underpinning argument for specialist provision. It is worth pointing out that the teachers in both the classes we visited were adult numeracy specialists, with no specific training in ESOL methods. Other initiatives we are aware of, such as an ESOL numeracy project running at Wakefield College as part of the Yorkshire Pathfinder, employed a team teaching approach with an ESOL practitioner working with an adult numeracy practitioner.

The teachers we observed were teaching the language of maths, in particular the specialist vocabulary for doing maths in English. Below is an episode with this vocabulary focus, interestingly also involving group work.

### Episode 3: Matching mathematical symbols with words

Sally: *O.K., are you ready?*

*She invites P to join L and N with this activity (matching mathematical symbols to the word labels). As she spreads the cards out, she reminds the students of last week's lesson, "Do you remember when last week we talked about these symbols?" At first, Sally asks students to match one word to the mathematical symbol making sure each student does at least one. Then she leaves them to work together to complete the activity where they place the rest of the words (various synonyms) under each symbol. When she returns, the students have nearly completed the following columns:*

+	-	x	÷	=
<i>add</i>	<i>subtract</i>	<i>times</i>	<i>share</i>	<i>equals</i>
<i>plus</i>	<i>take away</i>	<i>multiply</i>	<i>split</i>	<i>totals</i>
<i>sum</i>	<i>difference</i>	<i>product</i>	<i>divide</i>	<i>is</i>
<i>lots of</i>	<i>less</i>			<i>is the same as</i>

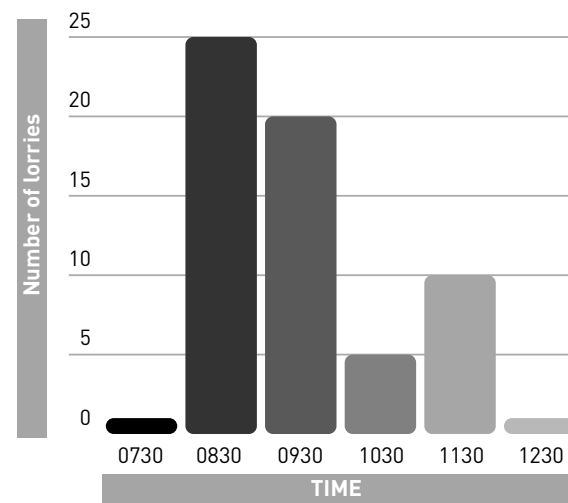
*Sally explains some words that give all the students a bit of difficulty like "product", "share" (Sally's example: If we won the lottery we would share or split the winnings. Or maybe we wouldn't she says making a joke.), and "difference" (Sally's example: If we took my age ... which we won't ... and subtracted Sara's age from my age ... which we won't ... that's the difference.).*

Sally's explanations contextualise the mathematical terms in relation to ordinary everyday situations. Ironically, for ESOL learners, these ordinary everyday situations, with their implicit cultural knowledge, may be more difficult to access than the technical mathematical terms themselves. The explanation of share implies a knowledge of the lottery for instance. We shall see this issue coming up again in the context of the National Tests.

Much of the language work we observed was word oriented, in particular focusing on the specialist vocabulary for doing Maths in English that was holding these students back. To use a technical linguistic term, Sally was teaching students the register of mathematics. Let us now turn to the goal of the course, that students should pass the National Test in Numeracy. Here are some examples from test items:



12 A householder thinks that too many lorries pass his house. He collects some information on a Thursday morning to send to the council. This chart shows the results.



14 2000 people were asked whether they chose to use 'Soapysuds' or 'Greenclean' to do their washing up.

75% chose 'Greenclean'.

How many people chose 'Greenclean'?

- |   |      |
|---|------|
| A | 75   |
| B | 150  |
| C | 750  |
| D | 1500 |

(The National Tests in Adult Numeracy Practice Tests DFES/QCA 2002)

Leaving aside the linguistic difficulty of these items, let us think for a moment of the cultural assumptions contained in them. Item 12 triggers a discourse world of home owners living in houses with a culture of political activism to protest about environmental issues to the council. "The council" assumes that any reader will know what this refers to, taking for granted an internalised representation of the British system of local government and an active citizen's relationship to it. The item projects a settled stable world in sharp contrast to the current lived worlds of the subjects of this study, living in temporary hostels, liable to be moved at any moment.

A similar argument can be developed around item 14, which alludes again to a current environmentalist discourse about green products in the home. Aspects of the item which are no doubt intended to invoke 'at homeness' for the person sitting the test, locating the mathematics in a homely everyday context, is likely to have the opposite effect on those who don't share the common assumption of the environmentally concerned home owner which is projected by these two items.

Looking at the linguistic demands of these items it is worth making one observation at least. These do not reflect just the register of mathematics, which is being painstakingly acquired by the students in the classrooms we visited. There is an intersection here between the technical

register and the language of everyday domains, influenced by deeply held beliefs on the benefits of mathematical learning in context. Each item is not just vocabulary but is organized into a mini text, both mini narratives as it turns out. So the linguistic demands of the items involves not just technical vocabulary but texts which are a blend of technical and everyday along with diagrams. These texts contain, additionally, considerable assumptions about shared cultural knowledge.

### **In conclusion**

In the classrooms we visited and in conversations with teachers, while finding a “common ground” of shared principles and values, characteristic of adult teaching, we also found distinctive evidence of cultural differences between adult ESOL and numeracy provision, both in terms of the ideas of teachers and forms of organisation such as group work, pair work and individual work. Although group work took place in both classrooms, the characteristics of group work were different, one of the clearest differences being that in the ESOL classroom talk is the work. So, typically, group work is organised to promote particular kinds of talk. Oral interaction was not organised in the adult numeracy classroom in the same way it was in the ESOL classrooms where it was more typically discussion and casual conversation occurring alongside a task. As suggested above, both ESOL and numeracy teachers worked hard to create a “safe” and interactive environment for learning, so to that extent were brought together by commonly shared values of effective adult learning. But the shape of the learning looked quite different in each classroom. Dealing with this diversity has many implications for basic skills provision more generally. There is a need for teachers across the board to become more aware of the role of spoken language in the construction of classroom activity. While this is most clearly “an ESOL issue”, there may well be benefits for students more generally. There is also a need for teachers to be more aware of the cultural embeddedness of the materials and examples they are using.

In the adult numeracy classrooms, the emphasis, for participating ESOL students, seemed to be placed on learning the language of mathematics, while as we saw in the National Tests, what they need is to be able to manipulate their mathematical knowledge as filtered through representations of everyday life in the typical test item. The adult numeracy teachers also seemed to be focusing on vocabulary, while there was clearly a need to focus on other aspects of language such as the genre of test items. Many adult numeracy teachers have well developed skills in doing this contextualising work. Perhaps what is needed to be built into training and professional development is an increased awareness of the language needed for participating in the classroom, in test events and in daily life.

In the adult ESOL classes we saw the teachers adopting contingent strategies to respond to the issues and problems brought into the classroom by students and the ways that students appropriate and make their own the pedagogical material, through humour, fantasy and anecdote, which connects with their own experience. This is of course not necessarily limited to adult ESOL classrooms as Baynham (1995 and 1996) documents very similar processes in adult numeracy classes.

### **Issues and themes**

In this case study we have identified the following issues and themes:

- Despite the overall basis skills environment which tends to emphasise similarities, there

seem to be distinctive cultural differences between adult ESOL and adult numeracy, displayed for example in differences in modes of classroom organisation such as group work. Group work seems to mean something different in adult ESOL and numeracy classes.

- There is a perception among the ESOL tutors interviewed that aspects of the National Curriculum such as ILPs are more relevant to workshop type adult literacy and numeracy classes than to ESOL classes with predominantly group objectives.
- The changing profile of ESOL students, with an emphasis on intensive courses and students with qualifications in their own countries, tends to blur traditional differences between ESL and EFL.
- The most distinctive characteristic of the ESOL classroom is the spoken language focus, both as the medium and the focus of instruction.
- The recognition of diversity in ESOL classrooms may take place not just through textual artefacts such as different worksheets for different students, but also through the ways that the teachers manage the spoken interaction.
- A distinctive characteristic of ESOL classes is the way that learners' lives impact on the routines of the classroom. A core ESOL teachers' skill is to be able to respond contingently to what is going on, turning it into a learning opportunity for the group.
- The primary focus for language work in the adult numeracy classroom seemed to be the register of specific maths vocabulary. When compared with the test items from the National Numeracy test it was clear that even in this relatively restricted environment, students needed other kinds of linguistic and cultural knowledge.
- The embedding language for the numeracy problems in the National Numeracy test involves not just technical vocabulary but texts which are a blend of the technical and everyday along with diagrams. These texts contain, additionally, considerable assumptions about shared cultural knowledge.

### **Reflexive account of methods**

In order to get a rich and complex picture of what was going on in the classroom, the case study relied upon audio-recordings, participant observation, field notes and reflections, teacher and student interviews and feedback, and a collection of student work and materials. Even with all the rich data that were gathered, some aspects of our methods had their shortcomings, but could easily be improved upon or structured differently for future study. The following are some of the issues – not all necessarily shortcomings – that arose after reflecting on methods.

**Role of researchers:** the researchers took on the role of participant observers which meant they spent time in the classrooms not only taking notes, but sometimes teaching a session in class, participating in learning activities, and checking over students' work. Students and teachers were encouraged to use researchers as a resource in the class. This was done in part to build relationships and trust with the participants. By the time students were interviewed, the researcher and specific students felt comfortable talking in the centre's coffee bar, over a meal in each other's home, or while taking a walk along the river. These informal environments encouraged discussion, while reassuring students that the researchers weren't there just to collect data, but were there to also really 'hear' their stories and get to know them as individuals. By building these connections with participants, there is a delicate balance between off the record and on the record interviewing, meaning the researcher is obligated to share with the participant what he or she has taken from the discussion and what may be used in the case study.

**Recordings:** no classroom recordings were taken in the ESOL numeracy course because one student asked not to be recorded and we respected that request. Nor were audio-recordings made in the Return to Learn class due to the sensitive nature of topics sometimes discussed by the students informally in the class. For these particular classes, interactions had to be captured through field notes, including detailed handwritten notes recording strips of interaction. However this lost the potential for micro focus on teacher and student 'talk'.

**Student interviews:** all the students who wanted to be interviewed, declined the use of an interpreter. Most students saw the interview as a chance to sit down and talk with a 'native' speaker and practice their English. For the most part, students' interviews were incredibly rich and insightful; however, there were some limitations to what students could express about their learning needs. Upon reflection, interviewing techniques that require visuals or modelling about class activities and learning strategies would have been useful in talking with ESOL students, perhaps encouraging extended responses.

**Numeracy sites:** for a more complex picture of what goes on in numeracy classes for ESOL students, more numeracy classes would need to be considered in a future study. This study primarily rested its conclusions on one specialised numeracy class specifically designed for ESOL students in comparison with the three ESOL classes that were observed. It would be interesting to audio-record ESOL students in regular adult numeracy classes, where there were larger numbers, in order to compare classroom discourse with ESOL classes. This would offer a more balanced analysis.

**Teacher participation:** one of the objectives of this study was to work directly with teachers, addressing their agendas. Although teachers were given copies of our field notes as they were written, it was more difficult getting completed transcripts to them quickly. Some teachers wished they had had more time to look over and discuss the transcripts with researchers before being interviewed. These discussions, somewhat belatedly, but just as vital for the study and future studies, are now taking place.

### Lessons for other NRDC research

- This case study confirms the already widespread view that the time is ripe to consider the access issues for ESOL students on other types of basic skills provision. This immediately problematises the "language issue" as well as issues of cultural embeddedness both of learning materials and activities.
- We have shown that for the non-language specialist teaching the language of maths readily translates into teaching maths vocabulary. Using the somewhat restricted example of the National Numeracy test items, we are able to show that the language involved includes the technical register of numeracy (vocabulary, and grammar), everyday language, genre, diagrams and charts as well as assumed cultural knowledge. If we were to consider the broader context of numeracy in daily life the issues would be even more striking. This more complex model of language needs to inform work on numeracy for ESOL students.
- In ESOL classes spoken language is both medium and content: talk is pedagogical work. Yet we also know that spoken language is crucial in all forms of teaching and learning. This suggests further work on the role of spoken language in literacy and numeracy contexts, not only for ESOL students but for students in general.
- If diversity in adult ESOL classes is organised primarily through spoken language rather than through textual artefacts such as worksheets for students at different levels, it may be that

current procedures for assessing ESOL teacher effectiveness are flawed since they fail to capture what is done through spoken language. This could be made a focus in the effective practice classroom observations.

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## Case study four - Reading

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### Inside Out/Outside In: a study of reading in ESOL classrooms

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#### Introduction: the research question

The overall aim of this case study is to investigate ways of teaching reading in the adult ESOL classroom. We chose to do this with reference to two adult education classes, class A and class B, not intended in any way to be typical. They were both dedicated ESOL classes, and both teachers drew strongly on what has come to be known as a communicative methodology in English language teaching. However, as the data shows, this was interpreted by each teacher in different ways.

Our questions were:

- How is the reading curriculum interpreted in the ESOL classroom?
- How do students make sense of the texts and tasks they are offered?
- How are the strengths and resources of ESOL learners taken into account?

Our major question emerged as the third of this set: how are the linguistic and cultural strengths and resources of ESOL learners taken into account in the choice of texts and reading methodology? While our data invites the scrutiny of a number of strands, we shall focus here on this one: the way in which students' 'outside' knowledge of the world is brought into play in the interpretation of the text and task. One of the course books used was called *Inside Out*. We have extended the metaphor to take an interest in 'the outside in', selecting key moments in the data when students are bringing the outside in, as they do the prescribed tasks around text. That is, how do they draw on the linguistic, cultural and intellectual resources they bring both from their immediate context in urban Britain and their worlds as immigrants to Britain? At the same time how do the teacher and the materials acknowledge those resources?

We want to argue that it is not just the kind of materials made use of, but *how* they are deployed in individual or group work that maximises these learner resources. Crucially too, in what manner and to what extent does teacher discourse offer spaces for class participants to build on the shared resources of all class members? Underpinning our questions was the wish to acknowledge views of reading beyond either orthodox decoding or comprehension models, which allow for the possibilities of diverse ways of drawing on textual meaning relative to the reader's needs, life experiences and interests. Practically speaking in the classroom, this might mean going beyond the prescribed task, or realigning it to serve different purposes.

A further more immediate factor in the teaching of reading was the recent introduction of the adult ESOL curriculum, developed by the Basic Skills Agency on behalf of the DfES (2001). All adult ESOL provision will in future need to make reference to this new curriculum. So a further subsidiary question was:

What is the impact of the adult ESOL curriculum and how does this new curriculum mesh with longer standing practice?

### **Class A**

Class A took place at one site of a college of further education located in central London which attracts a wide diversity of ESOL students from different backgrounds, including a large population of asylum seekers and refugees. The class was an ESOL class assessed as being Level 1 on the ESOL curriculum. There were 20 students on the class list, with an average of around 15 attending. They were from Colombia, Ecuador, Lebanon, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Albania and Cameroon. There was a range of ages from late teens to mid – fifties and an equal divide of men and women. There was a marked variety in the lengths of time each person had spent in the UK, some having been here as little as nine months and others over ten years. They were from a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds: their jobs in their countries of origin included dental technician, meteorologist, special needs teacher, book-keeper, fine arts lecturer, housewife and self-employed businessman, as well as several of the younger members who had been students.

The learners chosen for close observation were Leila and Henri. They were chosen because they were good attenders and seemed to be active participants in their classes.

**Leila** is Lebanese, speaks Arabic and French and has been in the UK for 14 years. She has not done a lot of formal study of English before because as a single mother she has been involved in bringing up her daughter full time. She worked as a secretary in Lebanon and is now ready to go back to work. She is applying next year to do a course in airline ticketing.

**Henri** is a French speaker from Cameroon who has been in the UK for under a year. He has a degree in Management, and specialised in Marketing. In Cameroon he was the manager of a supermarket. After this course he received an offer of a university place to study for an MBA, conditional on him getting a score of six on the IELTS test.

### **Class B**

The college is also a large one encompassing several districts in west London and has a similarly diverse student population. The class, which met for four hours every morning, was E3 on the ESOL Curriculum. There were over 20 students on the list with fewer attending. They were from Kosovo, Ukraine, Iraq, Iran, China, Burundi, Croatia, and Armenia and were mainly asylum seekers and refugees. The age range was similarly broad, with some members of the class being only just 16 and there was again an equal divide of men and women. The students also varied in the length of time they had been resident in the UK, some having been settled for over ten years and others being relatively new arrivals.

The students chosen for close observation were Xuemin from China and Lin from Burundi. While each was a less regular attender than the selected students from class A, especially Xuemin, we felt that they represented a good contrast with each other, in terms of language background and life experience.

**Xuemin** is a young woman in her 20s from China who, strictly speaking, was not eligible for

this free class designated for refugees and asylum seekers. She had been in Britain for about 18 months and planned to go back to China. She is highly literate in Chinese and talks frequently in interviews about how rapidly and effectively she reads in Chinese in contrast to English. She makes very heavy use of translation as a strategy in text comprehension in the lessons where her class texts are liberally sprinkled with Chinese characters; she also frequently refers to an electronic Chinese/English dictionary. Outside class her friends are with other non-English speakers, but not Chinese, one particularly close friend being Greek.

**Lin** is a refugee from Burundi and he has been in Britain for four years. He reveals at one point that one parent was from the Tutsi tribe, the other a Hutu, which might have made his position politically difficult within Burundi, although he did not elaborate on this. He does some casual work as a security guard but has a university degree from Burundi and is multilingual and multiliterate in English, French, Kirundi and Kiswahili. At one point in class Lin offers a full account not just of the role of French, Kiswahili and Kirundi in Burundi but their role in Africa more widely (especially Kiswahili). He also explains to the other students the difference between the French of France and of Belgium, (by reference to the fact that Belgian French has a different way of saying 70 and 90). He is also a multilingual email user, in English, French and Swahili, noting that it is cheaper to send emails to Africa than to write letters. His friendships outside class are with Tanzanians with whom Kiswahili is the common language.

## Research Methodology

We observed each class as participant observers once a week for one term (January to April 2003), making a total of 19 observations. We each concentrated on one class in particular but also visited the other classes more than once, so we were able to compare and contrast them. The classes were also each observed by Paul Shrubshall who later worked on the analysis of the classroom data with us. This gave us a “three sided” view of what was happening in both classrooms. The teachers were asked to concentrate on reading for the lessons we would observe, but we did not stipulate what type of texts or activity they should select. We took extensive field notes of each lesson and recorded the final four, giving us 16 hours of recorded classroom data. We observed closely two students in each class, interviewing them on four separate occasions after their lessons. We also talked formally and informally with the teachers and recorded one interview with each of them. While we have not focused extensively in this paper on the teacher interviews, each teacher has been given the opportunity to comment on the paper and suggest changes. We also draw on the lesson plans, classroom texts and tasks of each class we observed.

## Reading

We were interested not only in the teachers’ favoured methodology, but what views of reading appeared to underpin the classroom practice we observed. There are well-known and conflicting conceptualisations about the reading process. Major orientations are, for instance, cognitive psychological views which give attention to ways of promoting automaticity of text processing, (e.g. Grabe and Stoller 2002, Paran 1996) as opposed to those developed under the auspices of the new Literacy Studies which see literacy – or literacies, less as efficient text processing than as contextually situated social practices (cf e.g. Barton, 1994 and Street, 1984, 1993). If one turns to models developed in literary study, reader response views (cf e.g. Iser, 1978) privilege the reader over the text, validating the legitimacy of a range of reader



interpretations, while recent work on critical literacy (e.g. Wallace, 2003) gives some power back to the text by encouraging readers to look for bias and persuasion within texts. All of these elements are present within the new ESOL curriculum, variously emphasised at different reader levels.

The manner in which the teacher interprets both the wider curriculum and more specifically the new ESOL curriculum, will reveal how far a particular reading pedagogy is favoured. For instance, is there extensive drilling of the pronunciation of words which would suggest a view of reading centred around learning and practising new words, along with their phonological realisation? Does the teacher make reference, implicitly or explicitly, to a range of literacy practices and text types, as in social practice views favoured by the New Literacy Studies? Is there emphasis on single 'right' answers or multiple interpretations as is the case in reader response views, which emphasise interpretation rather than comprehension, and where a range of responses to text will be seen as legitimate? Finally, critical literacy might be observed where students are invited to challenge the text, as is suggested by a sample activity in the ESOL Curriculum, at Level 1: (Students) look at images, headlines, content, language used: Is the article biased? Is it emotive? Is it logical and/or consistent?

It became apparent in the observations of the classrooms in our study that there may be a tension between the reading invited by the teacher, the text and the task and the stance favoured by the readers at any one moment in class. This might be because, as we note in discussion of the data below, learners opt for an interpretative reading of the text which takes them far beyond the confines of the text's representational meaning. Or it may be that overall framing not just of the text but of the class as a whole is resisted to varying degrees by the learners. We consider this issue of framing next.

## **Framing**

There are ideological factors which over-ride the more specific implementation of the reading curriculum. These relate to the manner in which the teacher frames the lesson, how meanings are 'put together' in the class (Bernstein, 1996). Framing relates to the nature of the social relations which accompany this meaning construction. Our two teachers, Jane and Antony, framed their lessons in rather different ways. It was partly for this reason that the tenor of the discourse was quite markedly different in the two classes; Jane's class was strongly and rapidly paced, while class B, Antony's class, was more participatory in the sense that curriculum content was, to a greater degree than in class A, collaboratively constructed by teacher and learners (cf Auerbach, 1992 and Wallace, 1989). However, although they interpreted it differently, both teachers followed a communicative approach to ELT, as evidenced in the salience of task as an organising principle, talk around text and, related to the teaching of the so-called language skills, a strong emphasis on pre-reading, while reading and post reading.

While the researcher looks for patterns in classroom practice, the teacher makes practical judgements relating to the choice of text type, topic and tasks all embedded within classroom procedures. We therefore look briefly at choice of text, topic and task and then the way in which the teacher proceduralises, or frames the reading event, particularly in introducing the topic/text.

## Texts, topics and tasks

### The textbook as “a dead mouse”

Unless a teacher has adopted a participatory curriculum in which students provide their own texts, he/she has to make a decision about what kind of material to bring in to the classroom. As researchers we had asked our two teachers to focus on reading in the lessons we observed but, although we did suggest a preference for authentic texts – i.e. texts not written or adapted for teaching purposes – we did not preclude the choice of textbook material. Indeed class B had a prescribed textbook, *Inside Out*, which the teacher did not make use of during our observations, though he did use other course book material occasionally. Class A did not have a set course book, and tended to use a mixture of authentic texts and texts from ELT textbooks. Here is what two students from class B had to say on the issue:

- 1 CW: *So, if you had a choice, I mean, would you rather use a text like the text that Antony brought in from the Metro today? Or would you rather use a text from a book? I mean which do you think is more interesting? Because this came from the paper today, didn't it? These texts of course, (those in the textbook), some of them are older. They are collected in a book. Which do you prefer to read and to study? Which is of more interest for you?*
- 2 Gina: *I like this one. (referring to the text brought in from the Metro, headed 'Why We Love our Desert Island Discs')*
- 3 Lin: *I like this one.*
- 4 CW: *Do you want to say more? More about, why this is more interesting, do you?*
- 5 Lin: *in the book sometimes if you read the story, it's not like, it's not ... what can I say? It's not attractive. When we found something very interesting, we brought the class. And when you read (read) this one it's more than the book.*
- 6 Gina: *Yeah, like dead mouse,*
- 7 CW: *uh?*
- 8 Gina: *that book is like dead mouse.*
- 9 Lin: *yeah.*
- 10 CW: *like a dead mouse?*
- 11 Gina: *hhh: it's so, you know.*
- 12 CW: *The book is like a dead mouse?*
- 13 Gina: *like solid things. You don't, you know, they don't get you. But paper is real,*
- 14 CW: *Yeah, because it has eh. Well it is quite interesting, isn't it? Because it's obviously about life in London. It's we are all interested in everyday life, aren't we?*

This was echoed by students in class A, who also felt that lessons which used authentic materials were “more real and useful”. At present the ESOL core curriculum does not stipulate the content of texts students should be reading (materials based on the curriculum recently published are not compulsory), so much as the genre or text type and level of difficulty, leaving teachers with the task of choosing texts which they think will be suitable for students and at the same time develop their reading skills.

### Topics: “Don't talk about the war”

The fact that the teachers both drew from a mixture of authentic and commercially produced sources led to a corresponding mixture of topics; those chosen during the course of our observations were health, politics, work, accommodation and what could broadly be described as “lifestyle” issues (travel, other countries, fear of flying, interior décor, addictions, collecting

things). EFL textbooks tend traditionally to be written for a young, educated, middle class and often European audience, whereas ESOL students are felt by many practitioners to require topics which reflect issues in their everyday lives and from which they can learn more about how to function in the UK, such as accommodation and job-seeking. This is strongly emphasised in the suggested sample activities in the core curriculum and reflected in the materials published by the DfES (2003). There is a sense among teachers, whether real or not, that some topics and activities “belong” to the domain of EFL and some to ESOL (cf Cooke, 2001). However, given the localised nature of ESOL and the economic strength of the global EFL textbook market, it is a fact that most published materials tend to be of the EFL type and inevitably find their way into the ESOL classroom, thus creating the kind of mixture observed in both class A and class B in this study.

An issue which will probably be familiar to most teachers of ESOL and which arose in conversation with both teachers was the issue of how to deal with dissent and disagreement and the voicing of unpopular opinions; this became particularly salient in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq. It is perhaps not uncommon for teachers to attempt to avoid “controversial” texts and explains why it is sometimes easier to take refuge in the “blandscape” of the EFL textbook (Clarke and Clarke, 1990:39). However, despite their reservations, both Jane and Antony chose on several occasions to bring in contemporary articles of a more political nature, two of which we focus on extensively in this study. Importantly, these texts seemed to foster an environment where students were much more keen to express their opinions and in which their “outside” knowledge of the world was very much in evidence.

### **Tasks: correct or negotiated meaning?**

The tasks designed by both teachers reveal something of the different interpretations of a communicative curriculum assumed by each one respectively. In each lesson in class A there was a strong emphasis on tasks which lead the students to learn new vocabulary, as well as those which encourage them to read for gist or specific information, suggesting a view of the text in the classroom as a vehicle for new language. There was clear, timed, staging of tasks with ample time allowed for plenary follow up to the group work where, typically, correct answers were supplied by the teacher. In class B there were more tasks whose completion involved students accessing kinds of meaning which only certain members of the class would have available to them. An example from the field notes is:

*The theme of the day is sites of archaeological interest and Antony begins by relating this to the students' own countries of origin: "Tell your group about any sites of archaeological interest in your country." On the table I focus on sit Lin, Xuemin and Gina. Each student talks about his/her own cultural context and also asks questions about the other's. A learner may introduce a topic, for instance the presence of jade as a mineral resource in China, but then direct a question to another student, as when Xuemin says to Lin: "do you have (it) in your country?" The students draw on a number of resources as they seek to express concepts unfamiliar to their peers, including visual representations (at one point Lin draws a diagram to support his account of how cocoa is produced, giving an excellent account of the process – how the fruit produces seeds which are extracted to produce cocoa powder), pointing to the blackboard for key words, and, especially in Xuemin's case, consulting an electronic dictionary. In particular they negotiate around the search for the right word, continually making suggestions or, modifying or rejecting bids from their partners.*

On this occasion there was a very high degree of task compliance. Below we consider in some detail the extent to which students do or do not comply with tasks, and why this may be so in cases where they do not.

### Lesson procedures

The lessons all shared an extensive episode of pre-reading. The purpose of such pre-reading is broadly seen to be building schemata, prompting or priming the reader by either providing new knowledge or reminding learners of existing knowledge (cf Widdowson, 1983, Carrell and Eisterhold, 1983; Steffenson and Joag-Dev, 1984). Content schemata, along with formal schematic knowledge (knowledge of genres and structures of texts), is regarded as an essential factor in the accessing of meaning in texts, especially for those reading in a foreign/second language. What is of interest here is the nature of the kinds of resources which the teachers draw on in guiding learners to some kind of schema alignment.

There follows a look at episodes from the two pre-reading stages in each class, in which we compare and contrast how the two teachers activate schemata and to what extent students are encouraged to bring their own knowledge to bear on this task.

#### Class A: “Struggling to be heard”

The lesson took place on 3 March, 2003 and revolved around an article about International Women’s Day taken from *The Metro*, a free newspaper distributed daily on the London underground. There are two parts to the article, the main body of the text which includes two photos of women demonstrating against war and a box inserted in the corner which focuses on the “connection between women and peace”.

The lesson follows the format of most of the other lessons we observed in class A, i.e. a pre-reading/activating schema activity, followed by a task intended to encourage learners to skim the text for “gist”/general meaning or scan for specific information. This is usually followed by word level work on vocabulary pre-selected from the text and finally a stage in which students are asked to respond to or extend the content of the text – in this lesson they chose a topic that interested them in the text, researched it on the web and wrote an article. The text therefore served as a stepping stone to a series of other activities and became one of a chain of tasks spanning several lessons.

### Activating schemata/pre-reading

In the extract below the students have been told that the text is about International Women’s Day and have been talking in groups about what they think will be in the text, which they have not yet seen. The teacher is getting feedback on what they said:

- 1 T: *So what ... what things did you think ... Liliana, your table, what did you think was going to be in the article? What do you reckon?*
- 2 S: *It’s about peace ...*
- 3 T: *Peace? Yes?*
- 4 S: *and freedom.*
- 5 T: *Freedom, yes.*
- 6 S: *Freedom ... not going to war ...*
- 7 T: *Yes.*

- 8 S: *Listen mothers, you know ...*  
 9 T: *Yes.*  
 10 S: *because if there is war there are many innocent children ... and they die.*  
 11 T: *Or suffer or become orphans, yes ... yes that's a good one, that's one thing that I think it does talk about. Did you have any other ideas?*  
 12 S: *Equality?*  
 13 T: *Equality, yes, good.*  
 14 S: *Yes.*  
 15 S: *about the history ... of the woman ... they ... you know [indistinct].*  
 16 T: *So something about the history of equality for women, yes, probably ...*  
 17 S: *And what is the*  
 18 T: *Yes ... Henri?*  
 19 Henri: *Sometime just the ... the temper of the women ... because every time ... she ... they are angry ... they think that ... they are under the domination of the men.*  
 20 T: *OK ... Yes ... Talking about women's problem, women's problems...*

We chose this particular fragment of data because it shows the speed and accuracy with which students were able to predict what would be in the text, which does indeed focus on peace, freedom and the history of the struggle for equality. The teacher's use of the word "yes" is in part evaluative, and in part an encouragement to continue. Jane acts as a referee for the students' answers. The speediness and shortness of these exchanges also reflect the fact that in this lesson, schema activation is going to be a shorter phase than the time spent on reading the text, in contrast to class B as discussed below. It is clear that the text dovetails well with learners' existing background knowledge about International Women's Day and the "women's issues" associated with it. It is also worth mentioning that at the time of the lesson the build up to the invasion of Iraq was very much the main topic of conversation for everyone, thus explaining both the students' and the text's emphasis on the link between women and peace. The intervention of Henri in turn 19, is perhaps an example of how one student tries to bring more to the task than is required for the teacher's purposes, hence glossing of his somewhat complex suggestion about the domination of men as "women's problems". A longer sample from the data of students going "beyond task" in this way is seen in the section on the Blunkett text (see below).

The activity being carried out here is an example of one of various devices for activating schemata which will be familiar to users of EFL textbooks. Readers "guess what is in the text" (cf Young, 1992 and his discussion of "what do pupils know?" and "guess what teacher thinks") so it is important that they have not seen it before – indeed this strategy requires that texts are "unfamiliar terrain to students but known to teachers" (Baker, 1991). The teacher thereby becomes the "knower" of the text who sets the questions, knows the answers and provides the framework for how the text is to be read in the classroom setting. The learners carry out tasks, at first individually, then in pairs or small groups and check their answers against those of the teacher who is the unique possessor of correct answers.

In this type of predicting exercise the next stage is often to do a first reading in which readers scan to confirm or disconfirm their predictions. In this lesson, however, the subsequent reading task does not harness further the background knowledge displayed by the students at this pre-reading stage. The activity following this task asks students to complete sentences with information they must find in the text; it remains open to question whether the readers implicitly confirm or disconfirm their earlier predictions anyway in the process of reading, or whether this is lost to the demands of the new reading task. Either way, the chance to

maximise the – in this case extensive – background knowledge of the students seemed to be bypassed at this particular stage and indeed at other moments throughout this lesson. Again, we elaborate on this missed opportunity for students to bring their outside knowledge into the classroom and to their reading in the section on the “Blunkett” text below.

### Class B: The “Blunkett” text

Does this ring any bells?

Some similarities can be seen in the second lesson we are focusing on here in terms of text type and topic. In the example below the teacher is introducing a set of texts taken from the internet about anti-social behaviour. The texts are highly topical and relate to the news of the previous day. The teacher might reasonably expect that his students will have some background knowledge of events in the news, which is indeed confirmed by the intervention of Selina in turn 34 in the second extract below, in which she accurately predicts the topic of the reading. Like class A, these students show a lively interest in and a wide knowledge of current affairs. The teacher has opened the lesson by eliciting the meaning of “anti-social behaviour”, which he links to the previous lesson in which they had been discussing crime and minor offences. He is now getting the learners to provide examples of what they consider such behaviour to be:

- 1 T: *have you been reading newspapers this week?*
- 2 S: *no.*
- 3 T: *wh news on televison*
- 4 Sel: *yes*
- 5 S: *yes*
- 6 Sel: *all the time*
- 7 T: *yes*
- 8 T: *all right, does this ring any bells, anti-social behaviour, the news this week?*
- 9 T: *no?*
- 10 T: *ok? that's fine you're going to do some reading, later, before that, at your table, can you think about, anti-social behaviour, and actually make a list of different activities? different things people do that are anti-social*
- 11 T: *shall we put one on the board, to start us thinking.*
- 12 Sel: *yes*
- 13 S: *mm*
- 14 T: *yes?*
- 15 Sel: *please*
- 16 T: *Selina, do you have any ideas.*
- 17 Sel: *why me first.*
- 18 T: *anybody?*
- 19 St: *social or anti-social*
- 20 T: *anti-social h*
- 21 St: *anti-social*
- 22 T: *anti-social*
- 23 Sel: *something against the law?*
- 24 Lin: *yes.*
- 25 St: *drinking opposite the Safeway hhhhh*
- 26 St: *hhhh*
- 27 T: *which is?*
- 28 S: *if people drink outside*

- 29 T: *yes? ok? so: what shall we put,  
(T writing on board)*
- 30 T: *shall we put alcohol?*
- 31 Lin: *mm*
- 32 T: *we won't include soft drinks or tea or coffee ok,*
- 33 Lin: *no alcohol*
- 34 T: *outside?*
- 35 S: *outside*
- 36 T: *fine.*
- 37 T: *that's one example.*
- 38 Lin: *oh*
- 39 T: *so perhaps we can write that down and start talking together, and continue the list, think about what you see as you walk around, things that you see that you consider anti-social, bad behaviour, ok?*

Here the teacher links the forthcoming text, current affairs and students' notions of what anti-social behaviour means. He encourages them to think about where they may have heard about the topic (newspapers, television, news), but his aim here does not seem to be that everyone arrives at the perfect answer, or a "correct definition", but rather a consensus of what students' own ideas are as a group (earlier he has asked "what does it mean for you"? not "what does it mean?"). The establishment of consensus is a marked feature of Antony's lessons and is brought about in a number of ways, typically through the use of "shall" (what shall we put?) and the pronouns "we" and "us" (shall we put one on the board to start us thinking?). Antony gives a considerable amount of time to pre-reading so that there is a staged process of initial class discussion, small group work and further plenary discussion before the text is introduced. Below is an extract from the second phase of whole class discussion, where the learners report back from their groups:

- 1 T: *Shall we report back to see if we've got any new ideas from different groups? Perhaps Mona and Julie, could you very briefly tell the class what's on your list?*
- 2 S: *one thing is the gypsy people you can see, gypsy, is it correct, gypsy people?*
- 3 T: *gypsy people,*
- 4 S: *is that how we call them, gypsy people?*
- 5 S: *we call them gypsy*
- 6 T: *yes, we have..g.. gypsy people yes*
- 7 S: *and we can see them, especially in Oxford Street I saw them and they come to you and-*
- 8 S2: *They are not gypsy, you can't tell that they are gypsy, gypsy people are you have special people who are gypsy and they are not BEGGAR*
- 9 S: *you think about beggars?*
- 10 S: *no, no they come to you and push you, give me money, give me money*
- 11 S: *no no*
- 12 Ss: *no no*
- 13 T: *people begging yes yes*
- 14 Ss: *no they are ... they are not begging*
- 15 T: *we can't say they're gypsies, we can say people begging, all sorts of people beg*
- 16 S: *beggars*
- 17 S: *now it's a crime?*
- 18 S: *they wear long dress, it's only woman, bring their children*
- 19 S: *on the TV, on the TV the police call them gypsy people that's why, it's because ... it's ...*

- 20 T: *OK gypsy, shall we*
- 21 S: *it's not anti-social behaviour in our community ... we haven't got any gypsies (laughing)*
- 22 S: *it's not anti social*
- 23 T: *have you never seen any beggars around Acton?*
- 24 S: *no, no not Acton*
- 25 T: *never? Nobody's ever asked you for money on the street?*
- 26 S: *yes, but there are cameras ... cameras*
- 27 T: *yes*
- 28 S: *now it's a crime ... £40*
- 29 S: *no not sitting down, Safeway*
- 30 T: *outside Safeway*
- 31 Ss: *now it's a crime ... yes yes*
- 32 Ss: *now it's a crime, it's not anti-social behaviour*
- 33 T: *shall we put begging up? That's a good one OK*
- 34 S: *you know Antony, there is new law now that begging is going to be crime*
- 35 Ss: *(students talking at once)*
- 36 T: *OK.*
- 37 S: *I heard*
- 38 T: *we're going to read about that, fantastic Selina, good.*
- 39 Sel: *(to other student) it's going to be a crime*
- 40 T: *so we've got begging, and I'm not saying that is anti-social but we'll make a list of our ideas, and what else did you think of?*

It is striking here that several of the students assert their authority as having expert knowledge about matters under discussion. One instance is where Selina informs Antony about the new law on begging, acknowledged by Antony in classic teacherly manner by 'fantastic Selina', his response conforming to convergence with the lesson framing (you have successfully anticipated the content of the text, in the manner expected of the pre-reading phase) rather than the astuteness of the remark, substantively speaking. Earlier in this segment Student S2, from Croatia, is anxious to make clear to the group that there is a crucial distinction between beggars and gypsies. It is a view which, after some slightly heated debate in class, Antony validates as he brings this series of exchanges to a close: *We can't say they're gypsies, we can say people begging, all sorts of people beg*. In other words we can agree that begging by *any* kind of person might be judged as anti-social. Even then, however, what goes on the board, over which Antony has unique control – he alone is the blackboard scribe – remains provisional; it is still open to challenge or further discussion. In this way, Antony positions himself less as expert knower than as arbiter. What is offered is both provisional and collaboratively agreed; indeed Antony is at pains to distance himself from an authoritative view, as in: 'I'm not saying that *is* anti-social, but we'll make a list of our ideas'. This might be contrasted with Jane's preferred framing where provisional or tentative responses tend not to be acknowledged, with only 'correct' and approved knowledge being publicly displayed on blackboard or the overhead projector.

### While-reading tasks

In the next section we look at how tasks are used in conjunction with texts in these reading lessons and what effect they have on how reading is carried out. The observations from class A centre on another resource the learners bring to the classroom, their different reading styles and strategies; in particular we question to what extent the task influences how the learners



go about reading the texts. The extract from class B and subsequent comments show how the pre-reading task (as discussed above) may influence the way the while-reading process happens and also looks at how students try to use the text as a forum for giving their own opinions about the issues which arise in it.

#### **Class A: "While-reading" task: different reading styles**

*"I read with my own words"*

The while-reading task is designed to encourage students to scan the text in a particular order to find information which will enable them to complete unfinished sentences. The students are aware of how this task encourages them to read in a certain way (Leila comments that "we read to ascertain an idea") but close observation of Leila and Henri as they were reading and what they later said in interviews revealed that despite the task they both approached the text differently. Leila largely carried out the task according to the intentions of the teacher while Henri read it in a way which showed the importance for him of bringing his own meaning to the text.

These different approaches are probably indicative of the students' different levels of language proficiency, as well as their differing attitudes to reading and the role of the reader. The approaches and attitudes are informed by the students' literacy practices in their other languages and by past educational experiences as well as their own personal beliefs about what classroom reading is for (the acquisition of new words? reading for ideas? getting the right answers?). What is of interest here is whether the task does indeed encourage the readers to change their reading style or whether their style "wins out" despite the task. Another question is whether the task necessarily "tallies" with a particular text. Leila, the strongest reader in this group, conformed largely to the format laid down by the task, reading the questions first and scanning the text for the answers. She finished long before the others and later reported finding little difficulty with the text. She is also the one who was most engaged with the content of the text in this lesson partly because she was fascinated by the subject matter but partly because she had less work to do in understanding the language in the text.

- 1 Leila: *When I ... when I was reading it, I stopped for ... what, how can I say? Like this girl 'A'.*
- 2 MC: *[noise of assent]*
- 3 Leila: *... 1917, woman, what ... I stopped there to find out the answer.*
- 4 MC: *[noises of assent]*
- 5 Leila: *And ... the second, 'B', 'C', also the same. Like we make stop, to find out and then ...*

With her "like we make stop" Leila is here explaining that she did indeed scan the text for the required information as the teacher had intended. Henri on the other hand reads the text first and then tries to answer the questions. He doesn't finish the task in the time allowed and later comments that his way is perhaps not as effective as the way the teacher suggests in the task (because ... when you read after knowing all the questions ... you see ... the answer ... when you continue ... reading). However, this does not seem to make him change his approach and he later says that he reads in the way he was taught in language classes at school in Francophone Cameroon, where he was encouraged to read first and answer comprehension questions "in his own words":

- 1 Henri: ... because when I read my text, I want to answer ... by my word ...
- 2 MC: [noises of assent]
- 3 Henri: ... not just to copy.
- 4 MC: OK, so you have to make it in your own words.
- 5 Henri: Yes. It's why generally I start by text, after ... when I read the question. Sometime I don't have the answer of the teacher, because [laughs] I ... read with my own words.
- 6 MC: OK, that's interesting. So you are concentrating on this, on how to put it into your words. But does this help you to understand it, to put it in your own words?
- 7 Henri: Yes ... because at school, I used to do, to do like this ... like that ...
- 8 MC: What did you used to do at school?
- 9 Henri: When I have English course ... or ... and we say [indistinct] ... we call it comprehension test ...
- 10 MC: OK [noises of assent] ...
- 11 Henri: It refer ... a lot of questions, used to only read the text. And after, read the question.

It would seem from these examples that the answer to the question of how far tasks can override a reader's own reading style or view of him/herself as a reader is that tasks in themselves may not be enough to influence or change the way readers read.

#### **Class B: the students' interaction round the text:**

"Are we all involved?"

Below we include a segment where the students are interpreting the task the teacher has set on the text. The questions are as follows:

Read the BBC online news article "Blunkett targets job culture" and answer the following questions:

- What is David Blunkett's position in the government? What is he responsible for?
- What kinds of anti-social behaviour are mentioned in the report?
- Why does Mr Blunkett believe it is necessary for the government to tackle anti-social behaviour?
- Who disagrees with Mr Blunkett? Why?

In the extract Lin, Selina, Xuemin, and Sammy talk about the text. The teacher wants students to answer questions about the views expressed in the text (in relation to Blunkett's proposals). He circulates around each group in the class and sits with them to supervise the task.

In bold are the sections where the students are 'on task', in bold italics are the sections where students give their own opinion; in capitals are those sections where the teacher is intervening to get the students back 'on task'

- 1 Sel: **yes, where is it, about begging. It says ah yes, nobody needs to beg in this country**
- 2 Lin: mm
- 3 Sel: **I think the same, when I er**
- 4 Lin: yes
- 5 Sel: saw them
- 6 Lin: mm
- 7 Sel: at first in Oxford street or somewhere, **I couldn't believe it in this country**
- 8 Sa: **yes**
- 9 Sel: because this government
- 10 Lin: **helps you**

- 11 Sel: **help everybody**
- 12 Lin: *mmm*
- 13 Sel: *they are there begging especially young people, boys they are sitting*
- 14 Lin: *normally*
- 15 Sel: *we have one and*
- 16 Sa: **they are just greedy I think**
- 17 Xue: **no no no** some of them they came here they apply asylum but th- the **they not lazy, they not ( ) they not ( ), and it's not like before you get home they give you home if you're homeless,**
- 18 Lin: *so they are homeless*
- 19 Xue: *they are homeless, they are real homeless you can't- you can't find room and do you know how much they gave them per week?*
- 20 Lin: *mm*
- 21 Xue: *thirty six or thirty seven pound, fault, th-*
- 22 Sel: *for homeless?*
- 23 Xue: *no all the people apply asylum and it's difficult find a job even if it's*
- 24 Sel: *sometimes you see English people are*
- 25 T: **ARE WE ALL INVOLVED?**
- 26 Lin: *mm*
- 27 Sel: *sitting in the street and = begging=*
- 28 T: **HAVE YOU GONE THROUGH ALL OF THOSE QUESTIONS?**
- 29 Lin: *no-we discuss it first*
- 30 Xue: **I don't think it's because they are not enough, because they are drunk or**
- 31 Lin: *yes, about English people asking for money, you know bus stop*
- 32 Lin: *how about I get thirty pounds I just want to go home*
- 33 Sel: *( )*
- 34 T: *sorry?*
- 35 Sel: **nobody needs to beg in this country**
- 36 Sel: *right*
- 37 Sel: *it was the same ( ) when I first saw the beggars in this country*
- 38 T: *mhm you think it's not necessary, OK, HAVE WE REACHED QUESTION THREE YET?*
- 39 Sel: *Young and healthy*
- 40 T: **HAVE WE REACHED QUESTION THREE YET, XUEMIN? HAVE YOU ALREADY TALKED ABOUT NUMER TWO?**
- 41 Xue: *mmm*
- 42 Sa: *sometimes they need more money*
- 43 Xue: *I don't I don't know, I just*
- 44 T: *alright.*
- 45 Xue: *who I see all of the day*
- 46 Sel: **I think he just lazy, being doing work**
- 47 T: *ok*
- 48 Sel: *sitting there*
- 49 T: *b-*
- 50 T: *mhm*
- 51 Sel: *and he seems English*
- 52 T: **I think somebody in the article talks about this**
- 53 Lin: **yes here**
- 54 T: **what is it Lin?**
- 55 Lin: **it's one charity**
- 56 T: *yes charity to help who, the homeless people, yes*

- 57 Sel: **yes**  
 58 T: **can you find it, is that on the next page?**  
 59 Lin: **Charity Crisis say beggars need help not punishment**  
 60 Lin: **yes**  
 61 T: **right beggars need help not punishment**  
 62 Sel: **I don't say I don't say that I agree that they be punished**  
 63 T: *mhm*  
 64 Sel: *but*  
 65 Lin: **we need to afford them a job**  
 66 T: *give them a job*  
 67 Sel: *no(h)o*  
 68 T: *offer them a job yes*

Selina begins this episode by linking a major theme which has emerged in the pre reading phase – begging – to the text, homing in on ‘nobody needs to beg in this country’ the exact words quoted well into the body of the text, and reinforced by the visual image and a quote on page 1 of the web pages. In this way the response of the group to question 2 is partial: many other kinds of anti social behaviour are clearly mentioned in the report, e.g. the use of drugs, noise pollution, etc. The highly selective interpretation of the question is not surprising: first the pre-reading has highlighted certain issues, notably begging, while others which appear in the text have not been flagged; second there is the recent legislation specifically against begging, which Selina was already aware of. In addition the text itself is not cohesive, in the manner of website pages. It consists of a set of brief paragraphs many of which simply report – apparently verbatim as they are in direct quotes – Blunkett’s words. An incohesive short paragraph is placed in the middle of these sets of quotes: ‘critics of the changes say they risk demonising children and argue new measures against begging are unjust.’ Because the text is presented in this ‘bullet point’ manner a highly selective reading is arguably invited. Finally the text is likely to be very difficult linguistically for this group who are Entry level three. Antony tends to do much less vocabulary work than Jane and certainly does not do it in an exhaustive way, i.e. he does not mine the text in advance for the ‘difficult’ words. For some of the students at least there will be a considerable number of unknown words in this text.

However, a final reason for the nature of the students’ response here is that these adults have things they want to say about this issue, particularly about begging. Selina is one of the more proficient learners in the group who would not have struggled with the reading. However, rather than perform the required task she immediately uses question 2 in the given task ‘What kinds of anti-social behaviour are mentioned in the report’ as a means of launching her *own* opinion. Here ‘I think the same’ triggers an exchange between Lin and Selina which is echoic, with each supporting the other’s claim that begging is not justifiable in Britain, as in:

- 9 Sel: *because this government*  
 10 Lin: *helps you*  
 11 Sel: *helps everyone.*

Sammy then offers his assessment of the situation: “they are just greedy I think” only to be strongly challenged by Xuemin: “No, no, no”.

Into this debate in which all four students in the group are by this time involved comes the teacher. His opening question is “are we all involved?”. The question reinforces the class ideology, more implicit than overtly acknowledged, of the need for everyone to contribute to

discussion. While Lin offers brief minimal acknowledgement of the teacher's intervention, Selina's contribution overlaps the teacher's: "sometimes you see English people sitting in the street and begging". The teacher's second question aims to bring the students on task: Have you gone through all of those questions? The students clearly have not approached the task in the prescribed way, as Lin politely acknowledges: 'no we discuss it first'. Selina then deals with the teacher's request by aligning herself with Blunkett's view as expressed in the text: "nobody needs to beg in this country", but then we see her wishing to pursue her own agenda in line 37. The teacher reiterates and rewords his task focused questions, attempting to move the students away from the talk *around* text to a closer engagement with the *detail* of the text: 'Can you find it, is that on the next page?' We see Antony struggling to maintain the boundaries between non-educational and educational discourse. The pedagogy becomes in Bernstein's terms more 'visible' and more explicit. (cf Bernstein, 1996). Finally Lin, the most cooperative of the students, converges on the prescribed task by making the reference to the article itself "Charity Crisis say beggars need help not punishment". Lin continues in fact to stay 'on task' by expanding his answer to the teacher. Meanwhile the other students, Selina and Xuemin notably, pursue their comments *around* the text. Selina does this in a cohesive manner, claiming: "I don't say I don't say that I agree that they be punished", maintaining the theme of the need for punishment in her own contribution.

Here we see the tension between the students wishing to offer their own opinion on the text, in particular Selina, and the teacher's pedagogic agenda, related to the prescribed task. We might say the text is carrying *too much* meaning in a personal experiential way for the students to be satisfied to maintain the distance required to answer given questions which require convergence on the information in the text. In this sense, text type and topic unite to prompt strong resistance to the task on this occasion; it seems likely that both text and topic more readily invite personal opinion giving *around* the text than close engagement with its informational aspects. The students wish to use the text to make meaning in ways different to that invited by the questions on the worksheet.

### **Bringing the outside in**

In this section we take a closer look at the students' own views of their reading classes, on the basis both of observation of their reading and learning strategies at particular moments during the lessons and, more specifically, of interviews with our four focus students, Leila and Henri from class A and Lin and Xuemin from class B. We can see the relationship between the outside worlds of learners and the classroom in terms of how they relate to the chosen topics, their differing ways of reading or talking about texts, the extent to which they comply with tasks and their own ideas on what a reader is and more broadly what a language classroom should be like. At the same time, chosen material and methodology can be strongly oriented to particular kinds of teaching and learning which are exclusive to classrooms or there may be, as we have seen at various moments in the examination of the data presented above, allusions to life beyond the classroom as ways to anchor the learners' experience of learning English and of developing as readers of English in particular.

#### **The topics**

*"Chit chatting about something else"*

One strand to this discussion is how far the topics covered relate to students' own lives. Leila expressed an interest in popular psychology and material which she could apply in her daily life, such as health, as did Xuemin who argued the case for topics which have a close

connection with everyday life, such as food.

However, whereas Henri was “delighted” to talk about politics, Xuemin articulated the view, echoed by some others, that talk about contemporary issues such as the war (in Iraq which started during this study) might lead not just to the teacher losing control of the lesson, if matters became heated, but that the students would not be ‘learning language’, a theme she reverts to on several occasions: *“I think if it’s too special, too new, I just feel it’s not a good idea -I feel if we are talking in the class I feel the teacher will loss the control. The students will just see the opening about what they think. They not learn language now”*.

However, while certain topics may be vetoed as public discussion, at times the students talk sotto voce about contemporary topics. They are bringing the outside in, through what, following Canagarajah (1999) we might call the ‘underlife’ of the class, where counter discourses circulate which are beneath the scrutiny of the teacher. This is one such moment, where Vincent and Sammy both show their interest in the current war in Iraq. Ironically, though they begin by criticising their neighbouring group for not being ‘on task’, they too at this moment are not on task either:

- 1 S: *They (the women in the neighbouring group) are starting chit chatting for something else*
- 2 V. *Mm?*
- 3 S: *They are chit chatting about something else*
- 4 V: *Never talk about the task the teacher give them – they never talk about that. First couple of sentences talk about the task. Then that’s it, They carries on about politics and that*
- 5 S: *Politics exactly. What happened yesterday? Did they took Basra?*

#### Ways of reading:

Ways of reading, both as ways of processing text and of engaging with text in spoken interaction, also differ among the students, as seen in our discussion in this paper about the degree to which students comply with or resist tasks and instructions.

#### *“No dictionaries!”*

In class A dictionaries are strongly disapproved of, although this is sometimes resisted by students (our field notes show one occasion in which a student was hiding her dictionary under the desk and another where Henri disappeared for 20 minutes while he went to borrow a dictionary from the library upstairs). Xuemin resists the advice in class B not to use dictionaries as a first resort, making much use of her electronic dictionary, a source of fascination for the other students. Aware that this practice is rather disapproved of, she defends herself by comparing her difficulty with English vocabulary with that of her Greek friend who unlike her can resort to cognates: *“English comes from different languages and use a lot ... they use a Greek meaning”*.

#### Discussion about texts

##### *“You just use easy words”*

Xuemin was also doubtful about the value of discussion about texts, of the kind we saw her engaging in during the debate about anti-social behaviour:

- 1 Xue: *Because I said you pay all your attention to what you wanted to say, and just use easy words to explain er opinion. Use the word, you know it very well. Yeh. You don’t use*

*the new word; You don't -cant say the the the grammar. Something like, just your attention, or I want to tell you in the most easy way. Make you understand me. I don't try to use the knowledge what I just learned.*

- 2 CW: *That's a very interesting point. Yeh. How do you think the – how do you think the teacher could help you to use the knowledge you've just learned more.? Is there a way that – I mean have you any ideas about how how the teacher could force you to use that knowledge more?. You know .. So that you would be using the new words? Cos I'm very interested in that idea.*
- 3 Xue: *Actually the best way is writing. Really, really. Write down what you think; write down what you want to say and with writing you know because during writing time you will consider which word is better, consider grammar, consider everything. Not as talk. But to be honest I don't like writing. Its more hard (laughs)*

However, although students such as Xuemin are critical of personal opinion-giving and too much discussion in class, classroom talk was an important part of both of the classes we observed and happened both formally and informally as we have shown in our samples. Indeed Xuemin herself engages in “chat” quite prominently in our data, suggesting some inconsistency between her claimed preferences and her observed behaviour; at one point for instance she embarks on a quite lengthy anecdote about getting drunk, involving the other students and the observers.

### **Use of context and other resources**

#### **“I need to find meaning by myself”**

The data provided some strikingly diverse and rich examples of the linguistic resources and learning strategies the students bring to their reading and classroom learning. Lin talked about how he enjoys working out the meaning of new words from context and is quite insistent about the need to ‘find out for himself’ in advance of dictionary use.

- 1 Lin: *I need to found meaning by myself, yeah? And sometime after one time I need to found myself.*
- 2 CW: *Yeah, yes. So you really like, I think Selina was saying this, perhaps as well. You like to discover the meaning*
- 3 Lin: *Yeah, yeah, in the context of sentence.*
- 4 CW: *Yeah, and perhaps you check in the dictionary afterward?*
- 5 Lin: *after, yeah.*
- 6 CW: *Yeah, that's a very good strategy. I think it's a good strategy.*

Lin's preference for using context is evidenced during a particularly demanding vocabulary task. On this occasion the group of students extend the demands, cognitively speaking, of the task by adjusting it to their shared purposes so that it is more difficult. The task is a classic matching one, a common one in our data – by which learners are asked to match words and phrases, assumed to be new to the learners, with definitions which are provided. However, Lin's group opts to dispense with the definitions, merely working out the meaning from context. As Lin says: *“I understand mainly from the sentence. If you read you can understand.”* Lin and his group use a range of strategies to work out the meaning of new words; for example he brings in his knowledge of French to work out the meaning of ‘niche’. Sammy uses phonological knowledge to work out the pronunciation of the word ‘stint’ saying: “there's no e at

the end so it's not stinte." The students fail to understand BSE until Sammy offers "mad cow". There is even an indirect political reference triggered by the word 'dictate' – thence 'dictator' and there is a brief discussion, in which Sammy, an Iraqi student, refers darkly to 'you know who'!

## Conclusions and recommendations

If we return to our research questions and observations on models of reading it seems clear that both teachers, although framing their lessons differently, were focused on meaning to the extent that texts and tasks were selected and designed to support the construction of meaning as opposed to acquisition of formal features of language. The learners were active meaning makers, persistent enquirers of the teacher and of each other. Our very strong impression was that these learners continually drew on a wide range of cultural, linguistic and general knowledge resources, as we noted in the final section where the learners had interpreted the task more demandingly. Indeed, they frequently went 'beyond task'. By this we mean that they extended, enriched and adapted the task in the wish to bring in more of the outside, more extensive resources than were seemingly required to complete the task. On some occasions it seemed that the given task presented too limited a cognitive challenge.

What implications might we draw for the design and use of materials for ESOL classroom reading? First it must be emphasised that the learners responded well to the teaching and teachers in our study: these were successful and popular classes. Nonetheless, it seems that regardless of pedagogic approach there is untapped learning potential in adult ESOL classes. These were learners who had a high degree of awareness of their own needs, as exemplified in the comments of Henri, Lin and Xuemin about their learning preferences and strategies. The learners also bring to the class considerable cultural, linguistic and life experience resources; this is evidenced by the sophisticated talk around the "Blunkett" and International Women's Day texts. Implications are that teachers might consider more extensive use of contemporary texts which maximise learner input. At the same time, learners might be granted more control over planning and selecting the topics and text types to be used in class. In this way teachers could afford to relinquish their role as exclusive knower of the text and keeper of the "right answers" and learners might be given more latitude in their ways of interpreting tasks and devising varying routes through the tasks provided.

Rather than seeing texts as containing finite prescribed meaning, or tasks to be completed only in a fixed sequence, it might be that learners can be encouraged to draw on texts for a whole range of purposes beyond orthodox comprehension. Texts may be closely analysed – used as tools for learning new vocabulary-, they may mediate in cultural exchange or they may be used as a springboard for debate, a point of departure rather than a focus for attention in itself. A further aspect of reading which is particularly emphasised in the core curriculum is that of the most appropriate way to approach the reading of different text types. This is something which we saw little evidence of in the lessons we observed but which could have been harnessed to good effect in presenting contemporary authentic texts such as the "Blunkett" text.

To conclude, our overriding impression of the lessons we observed was of learners who bring sophisticated experiences and knowledge into the classroom. We believe that these resources could be more fruitfully exploited when making decisions about the curriculum and materials for the teaching of reading. Further research is needed to establish how far our classes are typical of dedicated ESOL classes in other settings and how far our findings might be generalised to lower level classes and to other learners with different educational backgrounds.



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## Case study five - Advanced learners

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### Bridge to Work

Philida Schellekens, independent consultant

#### Introduction

This case study is based on the delivery of a course programme called Bridge to Work which Croydon Education and Training Service (CETS) offers at its Thornton Heath Centre in Croydon. The Bridge course, which has evolved over time, is intended to prepare people for employment and is aimed at adults who:

- do not speak English as their first language.
- have advanced level English language skills.
- have professional skills and experience in their country of origin.

The Bridge course brings together in one package an introduction to the world of work in the UK, job search skills and language learning. It was selected as a subject for study for two reasons. Course delivery at this level is not commonly provided within the context of ESOL teaching in England and Wales nor is there much research on the needs of the client group with advanced language skills.

The main analytic focus centred on the teaching and learning process and the learners' reflections on their experiences and development needs. These are encapsulated in the following research questions:

- How do the learners reflect on and predict their language development?
- How are the learners' needs addressed in the classroom?
- How do learners and teachers make use of English encountered outside the classroom?

Two activities provided particularly insightful evidence for this study. The first was the interviews with learners. The second was the observation of the dynamics of the learners' communication with two teachers: one a language teacher and the other a freelance trainer who specialised in assertiveness and job search training. I want to demonstrate that the learners' awareness of their learning and their interaction with their teachers provide a telling insight into their perceptions of themselves as learners and users of the English language. Although the tasks of self-reflection and communication are different, it appears that common factors underpin the learners' responses.

### Overview of the language programme

The language programme, which was delivered over ten weeks, consisted of a compulsory core, known as Bridge to Work, and four optional modules:

Course menu	Number of hours	
	Per week	Per module
Core Bridge module	6	60
English for Work module, covering aspects such as pronunciation, report writing, doing a formal presentation	6	60
Preparation for IELTS exam <sup>1</sup>	14	140
IT module	2	20
Independent learning in Open Learning Centre	3	30

All learners were expected to take the core Bridge module. In addition, nearly all learners opted to take the IT module and those who were medically qualified also attended the preparation for the IELTS exam. Course participants also had access to individual advice and guidance on job or work placement applications. This support continued after the taught part of the course had finished.

### The aims of the core Bridge programme

The contents of the core Bridge module had evolved since its inception in 1999. While the topics were largely set and were based on the experience of working with previous groups of learners, there was a degree of customisation to the needs of each intake.

The programme covered the following aspects:

- Factual and technical advice on the world of work, covering major concepts of the recruitment process as well as specific aspects such as CV writing and job interview skills, and an understanding of what employers look for when they recruit.
- Personal aspirations and alignment of personal and work skills to the UK context.
- English language, which supported rather than directed the learning and which focused on work-based vocabulary and feedback on the individual's language use, in particular pronunciation and intonation.

All learners were interviewed before being accepted on the course. This included an initial assessment of their English language competence and a one-to-one session when language and other needs were discussed and agreed with the student. All students received a copy of their action plan with agreed goals. This was used by the teacher to plan the learning programme and as a tool to review progress over time. Learners with language needs which could not be addressed on the Bridge course itself were either referred to other provision or accepted on the Bridge programme, provided that they also attended the English for Work module and/or the Open Learning Centre.

1. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) assesses the candidate's ability to use English effectively in an academic study or work context across a 9-band scale with 6 as the usual score required to go to university. IELTS is also used in the UK as a first step towards the accreditation of the skills and qualifications of doctors, nurses and veterinary surgeons who were trained outside the EU.

### **Background to the learners**

The intake for the course, which ran between January and March 2003, consisted of 12 people with a wide variety of backgrounds. Their countries of origin were Iran, Spain, Benin, Italy, Belarus, India, the Congo, Peru and Uganda. Their education and employment backgrounds were also diverse. They included a midwife, a GP, a paediatrician, a physiotherapist, an accountant with an MBA, a maths teacher, a French teacher, a postgraduate student in economics and a computer engineer. One student differed from the rest of the group both in terms of prior education and length of stay in the UK: Alpa had been in the UK for 30 years where she had brought up a family and had attended various courses culminating in a certificate in childcare. Of the others, three had been in the UK for less than six months; another three between six and 12 months; and five between two and a half and eight years. All had learnt English over an extended period of time, either in their country of origin or in the UK.

Most of the learners lived locally in the Croydon area but some came from much further afield. Some had met at previous courses but many were new to each other. Elena, the teacher, was clearly aware of this and set up group and pair activities at the beginning of the programme to make sure that the learners got to know each other.

Two learners left the course within the first few weeks because they had found work. This left nine learners who completed the course and one, the post graduate student in economics, who left at the end of week eight to complete her MSc in India. She has since returned to the UK and was looking for work in finance when she was last interviewed in July 2003. The outcomes for the others four months after the end of the course were as follows: four learners went on placements with Croydon Council's Economic and Strategic Development Unit, the African Development Agency, Croydon Chamber of Commerce and Sutton Council. One student found a job as an accounts assistant and the paediatrician had achieved a grade 7 on the IELTS test which enabled her to begin the process of re-qualification as a doctor. The other two medically qualified people transferred to an IELTS preparation course, and the physiotherapist had decided to qualify as a Pilates teacher. The maths teacher worked as a classroom assistant for three months and intended to resume her career as a teacher. Since many learners continue to achieve job outcomes up to one year after the course, this list of achievements can be expected to evolve.

### **The staff involved with the programme**

Elena, the language teacher, was the main contributor to the course with responsibility for the contents of the programme and initial assessment. Elena also provided pastoral care and referred the learners to other support services, such as guidance and counselling. The Bridge students had individual support from Marsha, the placement worker. She prepared the learners for their work placement and/or employment, and provided continued support after the students had left the programme. The third contributor to the course was Maureen, a freelance trainer who specialised in equal opportunities, assertiveness and job search training. Her input on the course consisted of two two-hour sessions.

### **Research methodology**

The fieldwork was carried out by Dawn Henchy, a teacher based at CETS, and by Philida Schellekens. In addition, Paul Shrubshall from Kings College also observed two sessions and provided valuable input on the data analysis. Between us we covered three types of activity. We observed three full days of the Bridge course, and observed and recorded one. We also recorded the mock job interviews which were held at the end of the course. The second

activity consisted of interviews with a sample of learners on three occasions. Four students were interviewed in the first week of February, half-way through the course; four students were interviewed at the end of March in the last week; and three were interviewed on 11 July, three months after they had completed the course. While the whole group consented to the observation and recording of classroom activity, two learners indicated that they preferred not to be interviewed and hence they were not included in this activity. The third activity consisted of interviews with staff at CETS. The team of language teachers was interviewed at the beginning of March. Elena, the English language teacher who was closely involved with the project throughout, was also interviewed in July. Last, Maureen, the assertiveness trainer, commented on the draft paper and provided her perspective on teaching our group of students.

### **The students' reflections on their language and job skills**

In this section we consider the learners' reflections on their English language skills and their ability to predict development needs. During the interviews the learners were asked to review their language skills and their progress. Larisa, a maths teacher from Belarus, was one of the students who responded to this question. She had come to the UK four years previously and had learnt English from scratch since then. She dealt with the analysis of her skills development in two ways. In the first extract she described her newly acquired job-seeking skills:

*L: Obviously, I'm more confident than I was before because, if you know what you're doing, it gives you confidence. So before I didn't know how to write CV, I did not know how to describe my skills, I didn't know where to find the job, so I didn't know any web sites, I didn't know any resources, magazines, newspapers so I was really confused. I didn't know where to start so it really helps; this course really help me, to give me, help me where to start. So I can write nice CV, I can describe myself. Well, I didn't realise that I've got all these skills and I know where to look for my job. Now I think everyday I just look at all these resources, one day I'm just looking at the newspapers, another day I look in the magazines and other day I'm looking at web sites and they just, I can write a covering letter so it's really helpful.*

In the second extract from the same interview she described her English language skills:

*L: Well, I've been here for nearly four years so I think it's, it's ... I can't say that it's high but people can understand me and I can understand them as well, so you see that it's quite ok.*

The manner and detail of the descriptions given by Larisa suggest a qualitative difference in the way she reviewed her language learning and job-related skills. She was able to recall and enumerate job-seeking tasks in specific detail, listing skills such as CV writing as well as the tools used to find a job. It is clear, however, from her response that she was unable to define her language skills in the same way. It is not just that her reflections are brief and lack definition, she does not address the question of how the course helped her to develop her English.

Larisa was not the only one who struggled to describe her English language skills. Compare for example, Monique who simply said:

*M: Yes, I think ... I can make myself understood ... People understand me.*

Members of the CETS team of teachers were also asked how they viewed the learners' perceptions of their language skills. Here are some of their contributions:

*E: Well, I think their predictions tend to be very general. You know, if you ask a student how they want to improve and how they need to improve they generally tend to say something like: 'Speaking, or more grammar or eh or more listening' so it's a very broad sort of answer.*

*E: Yes, I was going to say, I have just interviewed three people this morning and all of whom said, when I said: 'I'd like you to do a test – don't worry' – and they all said: 'Our English is terrible'.*

A colleague who taught the preparation for IELTS course:

*C: And people often say, to take E's point about their English not being very good, even though when you analyse it, their English is good. But maybe it's heavily accented and they feel that, because they've got quite a strong accent. It's actually about establishing the difference between pronunciation and grammatical accuracy.*

The comments made by both learners and teachers indicate that the learners struggled to analyse their language skills in any detail. This impression was confirmed during the final interviews three months after the end of the course. These interviews showed that Larisa and Monique's reflections on their language skills and development needs were typical of the perceptions of the group. It is of course true that a 60-hour course could not be expected to have a significant impact on the learners' language skills or their awareness, especially when seen in the context of their previous history of language learning either in the UK or in their country of origin. At any rate, in the later interviews the learners were similarly non-specific in their comments on their language learning. For example, when Malini was asked to explore why it was hard to analyse language performance she addressed the question by talking about communication, confidence building and looking for jobs. Gladys felt that before the course she was able to talk about general topics and daily events but that she could not talk about her job. Having done the course she was more confident talking about her career in English. She then enumerated some of the activities which had helped her such as preparing for presentations and completing application forms, all practical tasks which were similar to the activities Larisa described.

These were advanced language learners whose ability to speak English enabled them to express their views perfectly well. Nevertheless, the consistent message was that the learners found it hard to analyse their language learning. Moreover, there appeared to be a degree of unease while making an attempt to do it. Lastly, when trying to reflect on why they found it so hard to evaluate their own language learning, the learners could not explain why this was so.

### **Addressing the learners' needs in the classroom**

The second focus of our research centred on teaching and learning activity in the Bridge classroom. Our observations showed that the teacher and the learners spent a significant amount of time on the learners' familiarisation with UK recruitment practice and specific job

search techniques. Within this job search framework Elena, the language teacher, paid frequent attention to the use of English, especially vocabulary building, understanding of concepts and pronunciation. Elena encouraged the learners to take responsibility for their own learning from the start, for example, asking the learners to explore the responsibilities of the teacher and learner during the induction session. Without explicit discussion she and the learners also quickly established a language classroom protocol where the teacher took the lead. She set up learning activities, provided the students with information on job search and feedback on their language performance and created opportunities for the learners to reflect on their own experience of recruitment practice. The learners looked up unfamiliar words in their dictionaries and those that shared a common language conferred at times in their own language. These aspects and sensitivities are typical of interaction in the ESOL classroom.

Here are two extracts on equal opportunities and the recruitment process which give a flavour of the exchanges between learners and teacher.

### Equal opportunities

In the first extract Elena and the group are exploring the concept of equal opportunities in the learners' countries of origin. Elena directs the focus to India, Malini's country of origin:

E: *India, it does exist, doesn't it, the concept, the idea?*

M: *Yes.*

E: *People know about it.*

M: *Yes, it exists but like government are putting forward many steps for giving equal opportunities to women also, like they are. ... they have given thirty three percent seats in er parliament.*

E: *... parliament, yes [models pronunciation]*

M: *parliament [repeats correct pronunciation]*

E: *To who?*

M: *For whom, to whom*

E: *Oh, to women!*

M: *... to women.*

E: *So they've had, like a, positive erm*

M: *Yes*

E: *Affirmative action, yes*

M: *But still in rural areas ...*

E: *Yes*

M: ... *it's not true.*

E: *Yes did you catch that er word, what kind of areas?*

M: *Rural ...*

E: *Rural yes, another lovely pronunciation word, yes rural means in the ... countryside*

G: *Countryside, yes*

In this extract there is activity at multiple levels. The primary objective is to explore the concept of equal opportunities, allowing Malini and her colleagues to describe practice in their native countries and cultures. While this exchange is taking place, Elena blends language-specific aspects into the discourse. She responds to Malini's pronunciation of parliament by modelling the correct pronunciation which Malini in turn is heard to repeat. Elena also picks up the word 'rural' for its pronunciation and meaning.

### **The recruitment process**

In the second extract the learners have just been asked to sequence the tasks that make up the job interview process. While they are doing this Elena is heard talking to one of the students who has a severely disabled child and whose care arrangements have broken down.

Then Monique and Baltasar, who are working together, get support from Elena:

B: *Prepare interview before doing ...*

M: *Yes, induction yes ...*

B: *Sorting, yes, shortlist.*

E: *Shortlist (models the sound [sh])*

B: *Shortlist ... shortlist (practises [sh]).*

Elena calls the group together:

E: *Can I just interrupt you ladies and gentlemen? Just a moment! Induction, what does it mean here? Nothing to do with midwifery ... What does an induction mean in a job or ... We had an induction didn't we?*

M: *They let you be familiar with to look at the places ...*

B: *Explaining about the job, the company and ...*

E: *Yes, so they take you round to talk to you about health and safety, maybe erm, you know, introduce you to other staff. It's a kind of introductory, if you think of introduction which is a similar word to help you remember ... induction ...*

E: *It's something very different in your profession ...*



A minute later:

*E: Then you write the advert and advertise, and then you shortlist, shortlist ok?*

*B: Shortlist, shortlist....*

*E: Your favourite word, shortlist, so if you had erm a hundred candidates or applicants, initially, and then maybe sixty erm filled in their forms, how many do you think you would shortlist, out of sixty. Twenty five?*

Again, activity takes place on several levels. The students in their small groups explore the process of job applications and the language that accompanies the topic. Elena moves around the groups, giving individual feedback to Baltasar on the pronunciation of [sh], a sound which he finds difficult. Elena and Baltasar continue working on it in the large group discussion when she reinforces and he takes the opportunity to work on the sound again. Elena had also noticed Monique using the word 'induction' which she stores for the time being while she helps Baltasar. She then calls the whole group together to explore this word, creating within this discussion a special context for Akhtar, who is a qualified midwife, by signalling that 'induction' also has a technical medical meaning. Lastly, Elena extends pastoral care to the learner whose child has special needs.

These episodes were typical of classroom interaction and Elena's teaching. She guided and supported the learners, anticipating their professional, language and pastoral needs. While at first sight it appeared that Elena offered a series of unconnected language interventions, it became clear that these were deliberate and aimed at specific learners. When asked what pedagogy underpinned this approach, Elena explained that she anticipated what the learners might not know and that, as she developed her understanding of the learners' individual needs during the course, she introduced and reinforced specific points aimed at particular learners. These language aspects appeared as 'strands' throughout the sessions with patterns of instruction and reinforcement appearing over time, the most dominant patterns being vocabulary building related to employment and the fine tuning of language production, especially of pronunciation. The overall effect was of 'multi-strands' of language, each one of which was aimed at an individual learner.

What did the learners make of Elena's 'multi-stranded' approach? While there were examples where the whole group practised a specific aspect of the language, it was more common for individuals to focus on aspects which were relevant to them. Baltasar's effort to get to grips with the pronunciation of [sh] is an example of this but also the presentation of a metaphor such as 'a thorny subject' the meaning of which Elena reinforced by referring to it three times during one session. On being presented with an aspect of language which was relevant to the learners, they took individual action. They might note down new vocabulary and/or check the meaning of new words with their peers or in the dictionary. Feedback from the learners indicated that they were aware of the support given by their teacher and that they valued her input. However, they did not elaborate on what Elena's interventions consisted of nor how these helped them to learn.

One recorded interview provided evidence of learner awareness of the multi-stranded teaching technique and the lack of specific recall of language learning. This is what Larisa said on Elena's 'multi-stranded' approach:

*L: It's always like the tutor, Elena, she always helps us how to develop our English. Every time, anyway, it could be every five minutes, it maybe, it wasn't planned but if someone says something in wrong way or uncorrect she always tries to explain why and how to say it correctly. Every, I think yeah, every 5-10 minutes we learn something new.*

We can conclude from the observations of classroom teaching and the learners' comments that the learners valued the multi-stranded mode of delivery and the teacher's ability to anticipate learning needs. Yet it was obvious that these inherently good teaching techniques which addressed the learners' needs at a micro level had disadvantages for the learners at a macro level. As the two episodes reproduced above show, the instant interventions often interrupted the flow of the students' own input. There is a concern that this hampered the development of fluency and extended talk. Secondly, the teacher's anticipation of the learner's language needs may have impacted on and impeded the development of the learner's macro strategies, for example, their ability to manage communication with native English speakers. We shall come back to this in the section on communication outside the classroom.

### **Bringing outside language into the classroom**

The third research question focused on the extent to which Bridge teachers and learners made use of language encountered outside the classroom. As far as the written course materials were concerned, they consisted almost exclusively of realia. For instance, Elena drew on documentation produced by Croydon Council to inform the process of applying for jobs. Maureen used materials aimed at native English speakers to deliver assertiveness training. Maria helped the learners with their forms and other documentation for job and work placement applications.

The oral communication was more difficult to classify. In the ESOL classroom language is the tool as well as the object for exploration and task execution, and as such can be seen as both real and simulated. Our observations showed that aspects of the discourse produced in the classroom were simulated, for example a set task where the learners were asked to imagine themselves in a particular interview situation. At other times Elena and the learners communicated in a manner which closely reflected the work environment, not least because features of Elena's language use were similar to those used in the workplace: she set a fast pace, introduced high level concepts and used humour and banter as it is often found at work.

The learners themselves used an interesting combination of language and learning skills. While their high level of language skills enabled them to achieve the equivalent of native speaker exchanges at times, the techniques they used to learn the language were typical of English language learners. These included classroom activity on pronunciation, intonation and vocabulary work. The learners used many of the conventions common in the English language classroom such as checking back for meaning in their first language with fellow language speakers or by looking up words in the dictionary. Elena also drew on the learners' own experiences, for example, she would ask them to reflect on how they might apply for a job in their country of origin and what equal opportunities might mean there.

### **Making use of communication encountered outside the classroom**

In addition to the introduction of outside sources of language in the classroom, the learners were also asked to reflect on the language they encountered outside it. They were asked to keep a weekly diary in which they would note any examples of successful and unsuccessful communication with native English speakers outside the classroom as well as their reflections on their learning in the classroom. Unfortunately this part of the research study was the least successful. While the learners produced limited general descriptions of what had happened in class, they found it very hard to give examples of communication outside the classroom; nor did they find it easy to identify how far the Bridge course had helped them to cope with communication outside the classroom. As to the reasons why it was hard for the learners to keep a diary, the main argument given was that the learners did not have the time to complete it on a weekly basis. However, underlying this was an uncertainty of what the purpose of the diary would be and what should go in it. Secondly, oral language is so fleeting that it is not just hard to control at the time of utterance, but also difficult to monitor, especially for second language speakers.

Whilst the keeping of a diary was not successful and was in fact abandoned, there was another source of language used on the course: the learners spent time in the classroom with people who were not trained as English language teachers and who in effect brought the outside language environment with them. This applied in particular to Maureen who normally delivered sessions on assertiveness and job interview training to native English speakers and who was hired to do the same with our group. In this section we shall explore how the learners interacted with Maureen, a speaker of a standard variety of English, and whether a different dynamic existed between the learners and Maureen and Elena respectively.

The topic of assertiveness was addressed in a two-hour session during which Maureen provided a series of inputs and instigated some learner activity, mostly discussion in pairs but also one role-play. Maureen's language use varied considerably in complexity. There were episodes during which the overall language used was simple and clear, for instance, the instruction to the learners below on how to produce definitions of terminology related to assertiveness:

*M: So I'd like you in twos and threes, where necessary, to write down definition in short simple sentences – 'What is assertiveness?' So you'll write: Assertiveness is ... ' and then finish the sentence; 'Passiveness is' ... and complete the sentence and 'Aggression is ...' so three sentences. Don't make them long and complicated, try and keep them very simple ... few minutes if you can try. Try without dictionaries at this stage, right, may talk about this amongst yourselves, you know, speak to each other about it, support each other.*

Embedded within these instructions were the three terms 'assertiveness, passiveness and aggression', terms which have complex meaning and are culturally defined. Yet the learners did not ask for clarification. The other source of clarification, the dictionary, was ruled out when one of the learners reached for his dictionary and Maureen repeated the instruction: 'Do not use your dictionaries!'

This was not the only occasion where the learners must have let complex language wash over them and where they did not ask for clarification, for example:

*M: We live in what's termed a patriarchal society when male structures and establishments exist in the society and there are many women who do not have equal chance, ... access, and share to what's going on in our society, right?*

A third example where Maureen covers vocabulary on an OHT relating to the topic of aggression:

*M: Let's have a look at the vocabulary: direct aggression, that's people who are bossy, intolerant, overbearing, that sort of behaviour ...'*

Again, the learners did not check on the language at all. In fact, there were only two requests for an explanation of vocabulary in the session, both made early on by Rostam, who was normally subdued in the group. He wanted to know what 'a creep' and 'tough' meant. Although Maureen explained these terms perfectly well, there were no further queries. Even more tellingly, the learners did not take action when they did not understand how to carry out a task. See for example, a private exchange between Alpa and Baltasar who had been asked to role-play what they would do if they went for an interview and found themselves facing the sun which made it hard to see the interviewer:

*A: Come on, you interview.*

*B: What do we want to do, we have to do?*

*A: Interviewing the first.*

*B: I do not know what we have to doing.*

*A: You interview; me interview. We sit down so you see yes, yes what do you do? Do you mind if I move my chair, something like that? For move the chair.*

It became clear that there was a striking difference between the sessions delivered by Elena and Maureen, the assertiveness trainer. In the former, the focus was on detailed understanding with frequent teacher interruptions. By contrast, in the latter there was no focus on language difficulties. The language was used as a tool with which to achieve tasks and the students appeared to go with the flow without checking back. However, while there was no overt evidence that the learners were aware of the different approaches used in these two classrooms there was one episode which indicated that they were aware of their own responses. It happened while Maureen was teaching strategies on what the learners (Ls) might do if they did not understand a question during a job interview:

*M: If you don't understand something, whether it's in your own tongue or another language at all, the honest thing, and remember being assertive is being honest isn't it? ...*

*Ls: Yeah*

*M: ... is to say: 'I don't understand'. Now, most of you said 'I am sorry, I don't understand' and that's fine. Right? 'I am sorry, I don't understand. Could you say that again?'*

Ls: *I am sorry, I don't understand'.*

*Gales of laughter*

M: *What's going on? Aren't you gorgeous'.*

It appears that Maureen's advice to ask the interviewer for the repetition of a statement caused the learners to drop into their role as language learners. This is in itself not so strange, as it is a common technique in the ESOL classroom to ask learners to repeat a sentence. What is strange is their response to their own behaviour. There appears to be unease in their laughter, almost as if they have been caught doing something inappropriate. If this is true, then perhaps we can ascribe to the learners an (unconscious) awareness of the different ways in which they handled interactions in the language classroom and with the general English-speaking public.

This subject was also discussed during the final interviews with Malini and Mandana. Their response was complex and evolved over time. This is how they started to explore Elena and Maureen's approaches:

Man: *I think they were different. I mean definitely lots of difference between them together. She taught us a little bit different from Elena maybe because I don't know the subject was different, I don't know ...*

Mal: *... and that's why we found they both teach quite differently but I think that they are same. I have not found any difference between two. They teach with, both teach with full act erm, I haven't found any difference between the two.*

They returned to this topic later, describing their reaction to Maureen's session:

Mal: *There were some words we didn't understand ...*

Man: *... but nobody asked ...*

Mal: *... but with Elena the thing is that, she knew that this is a difficult word and the students won't understand it so she herself explained that word. She knew...*

Man: *... before asking she explained that ...*

Mal: *... She knew us very well and we knew her very well, so it's a type of bond so you can say that has created.*

Mar: *Maybe you are right because we know Elena as well, language teacher as well but we know Maureen as a teacher to learn something about interview ...*

Man: *... she just trained us for interviews.*

Mar: *So we won't ask any questions because, personally I remember, I didn't know some words, I went and looked up in the dictionary but I didn't ask her.*

Ph: *Yes.*

Mal: *I remember but ...*

Man: *but no doubt we learnt a lot in Maureen's class as well about,.. because she actually trained us for interviews, so we learnt a lot.*

Man: *Yeah, but I haven't thought about this question before this, but I think, I'm not sure but I think, if we had some more session with Maureen, we would have felt ourselves more comfortable, we would have felt ourselves more comfortable with her as well. Maybe it's not just because of language teacher alone, ... language teacher you know...*

Finally:

Mal: *Yeah, it's OK but the thing is, that we are saying, is that there is no difference in both of them teaching but the thing is that if we have some more sessions with Maureen, then we also behave in the same manner as with Elena. They both teach the same but we need some time so everybody needs time to be frank with them ...*

Man: *... not be afraid of asking question. When I was younger than this, when I was in Belgium, I was just 19 years old so everybody knows I'm young and I don't know anything so I ask everything I didn't know. But now sometimes I feel as a doctor I should know everything. That makes me a little bit restricted to ask some questions ...*

Man: *Sometimes it happens that we think that if we don't understand any single word then we don't ask because we think that that person might say: 'It's such a simple word and she doesn't know this' and that will embarrass us. And that sometimes we do that, yeah ...*

There are several perspectives running through this dialogue, some of which are contradictory. On the one hand, the learners stated that there was no difference between Elena and Maureen's teaching and it is true that the two teachers were both trying to get information across to the learner. The learners also consistently pointed out that the degree of familiarity with the teacher was a factor in the interaction with that person, implying that the learners did respond in different ways but only because they knew Elena better than Maureen. It is undoubtedly true that a bond and common understanding develop between teacher and learner as they spend time together. On the other hand, the field notes of the observation of Elena's first session with the learners showed that they interacted much more with Elena on language than they did with Maureen even if they did not often ask for clarification themselves. And last, Rostam's request for clarification during Maureen's session was not followed by any others during the session.

The two interviewees also indicated that the third factor which affected their behaviour with Maureen was their perception of their own status and social identity. Mandana explained that she felt inhibited about asking questions because of her professional status and age. Malini's motivation was to avoid being thought ignorant. This appears to have created a conflict between the desire to preserve face and the fear to be thought ignorant on the one hand, and the need to ask for information or clarification which would have enabled the learners to manage the communication and tasks appropriately. It is also clear that for these two students the desire to save face outweighed the need to ensure full understanding.

Yet while the learners may have responded differently to the input of their two teachers, in one respect their behaviour was unexpectedly similar. The observations of Maureen's lesson had already shown that the learners asked for clarification only twice. When Malini and Mandana indicated during their interviews that they rarely asked either teacher for clarification, the evidence from Elena's lessons confirmed that this was indeed so. While in Maureen's class the learners let the language flow without asking for meaning, Malini commented that even in Elena's class she only asked for clarification if she completely lost the meaning of the interaction. Most revealing of all is Malini and Mandana's indication that with Elena the need to ask for clarification hardly arose because she anticipated what the learners did not know. As we have seen, Elena achieved this through her multi-stranded approach of providing instant explanations and feedback.

### Conclusion and recommendations

We now return to the research questions which considered the learners' reflections on language learning and their perceptions of using English in and outside the classroom. While more research is necessary to broaden and validate the evidence base, our findings nevertheless point to the following conclusion.

It is clear that, while our questions addressed a wide spectrum of language learning and use, the learners performed in a similar way regardless of the type of activity. The evidence shows that the learners were not able to be analytic about their own performance whether they reflected on their language learning achievement or on the interactions with their teachers. This finding indicates that teachers and learners cannot take for granted the learners' ability to reflect on their learning needs or their ability to manage communication with native language speakers. On a personal note, and speaking as a teacher and serial language learner, I recognise their predicament. It strikes me that learning a new language is a voyage of discovery during which the learner is essentially not in control. The learner is so busy processing language, taking in information and trying to create meaning that there is limited 'space' for monitoring of performance. It is even harder to predict language needs in that learners of another language cannot be aware of aspects that they have not yet uncovered. Since the *Skills for Life* strategy aims to strengthen the involvement of the learner in the planning and review of individual learning, a limited ability to reflect on and predict language needs goes beyond an academic interest: if the learners are unable to predict their language development, this has implications for negotiating the individual learning plan and the review process. Equally importantly, this finding reinforces the role of the teacher as the assessor and instructor who guides the learner through the learning process.

Secondly, what might we learn from the learners' perceptions of their language learning in the classroom? On the one hand, the learners consistently rated the input of the teaching as high. Their job and placement outcomes confirmed that many made significant progress towards employment. On the other hand, the learners' lack of differentiation between the teaching of the language and non-language teachers came as a surprise, as was their lack of insight in their own reactions. They appeared to be very much engaged in classroom activity while at the same time not being able to stand back from it. As a result, they did not manage communication in English as effectively as they might. In the context of discourse, it is of course hard for second language speakers to know when to take steps to manage communication. Because meaning often transpires as the communication progresses, there is rarely a single, defined moment when you decide to interrupt but rather a series of

opportunities. It is often only when the chunk of information is complete that you know you should have clarified, when in effect the moment has passed and you look foolish for having sat through a long monologue or discussion without asking for clarification.

It is striking that both the process of reflection on language learning and communication with native English speakers threw up a similar pattern of response: the learners were so busy processing language that there was not enough space to stand back and register or evaluate their actions. Since the learners involved in this case study were sophisticated, educated people who had by and large been successful language learners, this finding may well apply equally or more strongly to learners with lower levels of language skills.

What might the impact of these findings be on teaching and learning? It is clear that an additional dimension to language teaching would benefit learners such as those we encountered on the Bridge to Work course. This would consist of building an understanding of the internal and external barriers which the learners might encounter when they communicate with 'the outside world'. It would enable them to acquire the skills to be an active participant; reflect on how they come across; and use techniques to negotiate effective communication. In the wider context, there is the question of how these aspects can be incorporated within the ESOL curriculum; indeed whether the Curriculum pays sufficient attention to fostering these skills. The ESOL teaching community might also consider the advantages of the 'multi-strand' approach as well as how to overcome the disadvantage of instant intervention which interrupts the flow of the students' own input and the development of extended talk.

In the mainstream classroom non-language specialist teachers such as Maureen would benefit from language awareness training. This would not have to be a major or a complicated undertaking and could address the following aspects: explaining key concepts in simple English, checking that the learner has understood, asking open rather than closed questions and encouraging the learners to ask if they do not understand. It would also be useful to cover the advantages and disadvantages of allowing the use of dictionaries. Mainstream teachers (and their students) would benefit from an understanding that culture impacts on the interpretation of concepts. Maureen, the job search tutor, may well be typical of the teaching profession in that she was keen to pick up ideas which could improve her performance. It is likely that there are many more mainstream tutors who would welcome the opportunity to become more language aware.

Last, the use of digital recording and the analysis of classroom interaction and learner interviews has enabled an in-depth analysis of material and reflection which it would have been impossible to achieve otherwise. As a result, new insight into the language learning process has enriched the knowledge and understanding of the research team and teachers involved in this study.











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