EFFECTIVE TEACHING
AND LEARNING

ESOL

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RESEARCH TEAM

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CONTENTS

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Preface

The *Skills for Life* Strategy in England has led to unprecedented investment in adult literacy, language and numeracy (LLN), major reforms of teacher education and training, and the introduction of national standards, core curricula and assessment to inform teaching and learning. We have a unique opportunity to make a step change in improving levels of adult skills. But until recently too little was known about effective teaching and learning practices, and reports from Ofsted and the Adult Learning Inspectorate repeatedly drew attention to the quality of teaching, and the need for standards to improve.

It has been a strategic priority at the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) to investigate teaching and learning practices in all the subject areas and settings in *Skills for Life,* to report on the most promising and effective practices, and to provide teachers and trainers, along with policy-makers and researchers, with an unparalleled evidence base on which to build on the progress already made.

Our findings and recommendations are reported here, and in the four companion reports covering reading, writing, numeracy and ICT. The five studies, which have been co-ordinated by NRDC Associate Director John Vorhaus, provide material for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and for informing developments in initial teacher education and continuing professional development (CPD). We are also preparing a range of practitioner guides and development materials, as a major new resource for teachers and teacher educators. They will explore and develop the examples of good and promising practice documented in these pages.

The dynamism and large-scale funding for the *Skills for Life* programme have enabled rapid growth in the provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in England. Yet the demand for ESOL far outstrips supply in many regions. The country's demography is changing, partly as a result of migration from EU accession countries, and, with it, the profile of ESOL learners. What remains constant in ESOL classrooms is the wide range of backgrounds, life experiences and levels of education of the learners. This research sheds light on the challenges practitioners face and will help them improve teaching and learning.

Ursula Howard, Director, NRDC

1 Executive summary

1.1 The Effective Practice Studies

The five NRDC Effective Practice Studies explore teaching and learning in reading, writing, numeracy, ESOL and ICT, and they set out to answer two questions:

1. How can teaching, learning and assessing literacy, numeracy, ESOL and ICT be improved?
2. Which factors contribute to successful learning?

Even before NRDC was set up it was apparent from reviews of the field (Brooks et al, 2001; Kruidenier, 2002) that there was little reliable research-based evidence to answer these questions. Various NRDC reviews showed that progress in amassing such evidence, though welcome where it was occurring, was slow (Coben et al, 2003; Barton and Pitt, 2003; Torgerson et al, 2003, 2004, 2005). Four preliminary studies on reading, writing, ESOL and ICT were undertaken between 2002 and 2004 (Besser et al, 2004; Kelly et al, 2004; Roberts et al, 2004; Mellar et al, 2004). However, we recognised the urgent need to build on these in order greatly to increase the research base for the practice of teaching these subjects.

The inspiration for the design of the five projects was a study in the US of the teaching of literacy and English language to adult learners for whom English is an additional language (Condelli et al, 2003). This study was the first of its kind, and the lead author, Larry Condelli of the American Institutes for Research, has acted as an expert adviser on all five NRDC projects.

The research began in July 2003 and was completed in March 2006. It set out to recruit and gather information on 500 learners in each study, assess their attainment and attitudes at two points during the year in which they were participating in the study, interview both learners and teachers, observe the strategies the teachers used, and correlate those strategies with changes in the learners' attainment and attitudes.

The ICT study differed from the others in that its first phase was developmental, its sample size was smaller, and it had a shorter timescale, completing in March 2005.

1.2 The ESOL study

The socio-economic and political contexts of ESOL are complex, and impact on all aspects of effective teaching and learning. The super-diversity amongst migrant populations, caused by globalisation and migration (both voluntary and forced), means that ESOL learners vary hugely in terms of their immigration status, education, background and experiences of war and other strife (Vertovec, 2006). ESOL learners are over-represented amongst the unemployed and low paid. Many are highly motivated to learn English as a route to employment or further study and to communicate with local populations. However, they often have little opportunity to interact with English speakers outside the classroom, and are still subject to negative representations in the media and public discourse, perhaps as a result of

the tightening of the connection in law between immigration, national security and social cohesion (Zetter et al, 2006). The dynamism and large-scale funding for the *Skills for Life* programme has enabled rapid growth of ESOL provision, which has expanded well beyond expectations since 2001. Yet the demand for ESOL far outstrips supply in many regions, partly as a result of migration from EU accession countries. In this context, a study which looks in depth at effective practice in the ESOL classroom is therefore both timely and necessary.

1.3 Main findings

The teachers: Facts and figures

1. The 40 teachers had a diverse range of experience and duties, including two published materials writers, several who are experts in ESOL literacy, some with managerial and curriculum responsibilities and others who are on hourly contracts. Fifty-six per cent of the teachers are part-time, some of these being hourly-paid.

2. The average number of years of professional experience was just over ten, ranging from under a year to 30 years. The average number of years that teachers had been teaching at their current institution was just over four, ranging from under a year to over 20.

3. Over 70 per cent had completed the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (AECC) training and 60 per cent had undertaken other LLN training.

4. The backgrounds of the teachers include those who have spent a lot of time teaching English overseas and those who have always worked in a British ESOL setting.

Teaching strategies

1. In the ESOL classes we studied, of the four groups of teaching strategies and learner involvement strategies, those that promoted **balance and variety** and **planning and explicitness** were significantly more in evidence than those promoting **a collaborative learning environment** and **connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives**.

2. The case study teachers show that effective ESOL practice combines all four groups of teaching and learning strategies and also teacher qualities such as balancing conflicting demands and working with vulnerable learners. The term *bricoleur* (see Glossary) can be applied to these teachers. They can plan on the spot and pull together whatever is at hand to make the class work. They are eclectic in using and designing materials and activities to be highly learner-responsive, and this eclecticism is underpinned by a clear professional vision.

3. Our study demonstrates that there is a range of good practice, most of it more focused on teacher-oriented activities than on learner-oriented ones, and promoting the core macro skills of speaking and listening.

4. Talk is work in the ESOL classroom and these classes are largely made up of talk. The effective practitioner has to be flexible and able to turn talk into learning by on-the-spot analysis of and responsiveness to learner talk. This requires a thorough understanding of second language learning and pedagogy.

5. Less experienced teachers are over-reliant on the AECC and associated materials and cannot articulate a clear professional vision, including the flexibility of turning talk into learning.

6. The case studies can be used in teacher development programmes to illustrate aspects of effective practice.

Progress

1. Virtually all learners made progress at the levels researched (E1, E2, E3). This progress is clear both from test scores and learner interviews.

2. There were modest but significant correlations between strategies promoting **balance and variety** in the classrooms and gains on test scores. This group of strategies can be seen as core strategies because they balance fluency and accuracy with a variety of activities and materials that keep learners engaged.

3. The importance of balance and variety is further evidenced in the finding that learners performed best on the grammar and vocabulary sub-component of the test when they were taught neither too much nor too little of each: it is possible both to overdo and underdo the teaching of grammar and vocabulary.

4. Relative newcomers (those who have lived in the UK for five years or less) make more rapid progress than long-term residents.

5. Our study suggests that most learners are hungry for more provision and greater opportunities to learn English outside the ESOL classroom and in employment.

Provision

1. There are centres where the type of provision is not tuned to effective ESOL practice, often because funding requirements are tied to outcomes that take too little account of language learning processes. Language development is incremental, involving repetition and recycling over extended periods.

Time for study

1. *Hours per week* The average weekly hours were 9.6, ranging from two to 32. The figure here does not account for fluctuations in attendance, and should be seen as an indication of the intensity of provision, rather than the amount of hours individuals actually spend in the class. A moderate positive correlation between number of hours per week and mean gain in total scores was found.

2. *Lesson length* The mean lesson length was two hours and 15 minutes. The correlation between lesson length and difference in total scores on the two assessments was negative. However, the statistical significance of this finding is low and no firm conclusions regarding an optimum lesson length can be drawn here.

3. *Course length* The total number of hours for all classes ranged from 30 to 320 hours, with a mean of 122 hours. This figure represents the total number of hours taught between the times of the pre- and post-observation assessment, rather than overall course length. Thus, although the correlation between total number of hours and gain in total scores between assessment times was very low and non-significant, no particular conclusions can be drawn from this finding.

1.4 Recommendations

Development work and quality improvement

1. Teacher expertise and vision are the most important resources for effective ESOL practice, and both initial teacher training and CPD need to reflect this by putting teaching and learning processes at the heart of teacher education policy development.

2. Greater emphasis on subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy needs to be built into teacher training and more reflective practice built into CPD. (This recommendation supports the new initiatives in teacher education for ESOL.)

3. The General Teaching Strategies and Strategies for Learner Involvement coding schemes used in the study could be used to inform professional development.

4. Our learner interviews suggest that teachers need more help to support traumatised refugees and asylum-seekers, including training themselves and support from bilingual counsellors.

5. Since talk is work in the ESOL classroom, inspectors and those who observe and evaluate teachers require an understanding of language processes in order to develop criteria for observing talk. At the minimum, some training in noticing how teachers use and build in differences in language level is needed.

6. Colleges should encourage learners to join other classes, make informal links with other students and provide employment advice and inter-agency support within mainstream provision.

Policy

1. The super-diversity of ESOL learners cannot be fully catered for by differentiation in the classroom alone. Newer arrivals need adequate provision now so that they do not become the future long-term residents facing more barriers to learning. Pathways or trajectories through provision need to be developed which cater for specialisations, including more fast-tracking for those with skills and high quality careers advice. These pathways are more specialised but should not be shorter. They must be flexible enough to ensure that the learning is not reductive, and to respond to the changing ESOL populations.

2. The pedagogic distinction between EFL and ESOL has increasingly less credibility.

3. Given that long-term residents have a different profile and rate of learning from newcomers, appropriate provision, particularly in relation to literacy, is necessary. For the long-term residents, ESOL classes are often their first chance to learn English because commitments and constraints have prevented them from doing so in the past.

4. While good community provision does exist, classes held in community centres often need to be better supported, with better facilities, more experienced teachers who can offer specialist teaching in literacy, and a greater range of provision. The long-term residents often attend these classes, and so more attention and resources are needed to bridge the gap between this group and the newcomers. Colleges could take steps to strengthen links between off-site and main-site provision with visits and exchanges. Better crèche facilities on main sites would enable learners to switch from community centres to these sites.

5. The continuing lack of permanent and full-time employment experienced by over 50 per cent of the ESOL teachers in this study needs to be addressed for the recommended further professional development to be fully effective.

6. Expert professionals, many of whom feel undermined by the inspection framework and institutional requirements, should be part of any consultation on good practice in ESOL.

7. The two most important factors in shaping ESOL practice are the overall policy environment and the professional vision and expertise of teachers. Our teacher interview data, however, suggest that some policy initiatives are not ESOL-friendly, and their implementation shows insufficient understanding of language processes and learner needs. In particular, a focus on individual learning and individual learning plans (ILPs) can be at the expense of group processes and classroom talk and is extremely difficult to negotiate with low-level language learners.

8. Our study shows that there is therefore no magic bullet for effective ESOL practice. The major resource that can make or hinder the most promising methodology or initiative is the expertise and professionalism of ESOL teachers. This professionalism draws on both subject and subject-teaching knowledge and CPD that encourages an interpretive and reflective stance on teaching and learning.

Research

1. The focus on spoken language in this study means that key issues of ESOL literacy have only been incidentally addressed, although our data on learners identify these as worthy of future research. For example, it is clear that classes in which with both highly literate professionals and individuals without literacy in their expert language are taught together cannot be effective.

1.5 Limitations to this research

Although the first and largest study of its kind in England, this project still represents a relatively small group of learners and focuses on spoken language. It cannot, therefore, encompass the variety of learners and classes that are fully representative of ESOL in England, nor has it attempted to look at the rest of the UK. For practical reasons, we were only able to interview about 30 per cent of the core sample group of learners, although we consider that it is worth putting resources into interviewing learners in their expert language. Other important elements that we could not examine here were the experiences and progress of ESOL learners on non-ESOL designated courses (although these were addressed in the two other NRDC studies).[1]

1 Roberts, C et al (2005). *Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. London: NRDC and Roberts, C et al (2004). *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL): Case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources*. London: NRDC

2 Contexts, aims and methodology

2.1 Introduction

The ESOL Effective Practice Project (EEPP) was conducted as part of the research agenda of the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), which was set up under the UK Government's *Skills for Life* Strategy. The EEPP is one of a suite of five research projects that have the common aim of investigating the effective teaching of language, literacy, numeracy and ICT to adults.

The design of these projects was adapted from a US study of the effective teaching of literacy and English language to ESOL adults (Condelli et al, 2003). The projects were carried out in two phases, in 2003/04 and 2004/05. The targets for each study across the two years were to recruit and gather background data on 250 learners, assess their attainment and attitudes at two points during the year, observe the strategies that their teachers used, and correlate those strategies with changes in the learners' attainment and attitudes.

Ethnicity, nationality and linguistic diversity of *Skills for Life* students
Ethnicity and language background were recorded, although we are aware of the problematic nature of available categories (Rampton, 1990; White, 2002; Vertovec, 2006). We used the categories 'country of birth', 'language(s)' and 'oracy and literacy' for identifying these aspects of learner background.

2.2 Contexts of ESOL

The socio-economic and political contexts of ESOL are similarly complex, and impact on all aspects of effective teaching and learning. The super-diversity amongst migrant populations, caused by globalisation and migration (both voluntary and forced), means that ESOL learners vary hugely in terms of their immigration status, education, background and experiences of war and other strife (Vertovec, 2006). For many, learning English is a matter of urgency, and the demand for ESOL far outstrips supply in many regions. ESOL learners recognise the need to communicate with local populations and are over-represented amongst the unemployed and low paid. Many are highly motivated to learn English but are still subject to negative representations in the media and public discourse, perhaps as a result of the tightening of the connection in law between immigration, national security and social cohesion (Zetter et al, 2006).

Policy and theoretical contexts
Second language teaching and learning has a long history and draws on research in the fields of applied linguistics, second language acquisition (SLA) and second language pedagogy (Hinkel, 2005). In England, the *Skills for Life* Strategy brought ESOL wholly into the adult LLN agenda; this led in turn to the statutory Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (AECC) (DfES, 2001). A recent review (Barton and Pitt, 2003) concluded that 'there has been little UK research' compared with other English-speaking countries (Murray, 2005).

2.3 Aims of the project

1. To establish what are currently held to be principles of effective practice in language teaching and learning and to evaluate their appropriateness for adult ESOL in England.

2. To observe the range of practices in ESOL classrooms and to identify and document effective practice from both theoretical and practice-oriented perspectives.

3. To document the progress made by adult ESOL students in these classroom settings.

4. Where possible, to establish correlations between particular pedagogical practices and student progress.

5. To draw implications for policy, provision and further professional development of ESOL practitioners.

2.4 Scope and methodology

The particular emphasis of this study is on the teaching of spoken language, with the centre of attention on Entry 1 (E1) and Entry 2 (E2) classes. This focus was for two reasons. Firstly, the other Effective Practice projects had no emphasis on oral language and, secondly, more time is spent on talk than on literacy in ESOL classes. We do of course recognise that ESOL classrooms are typically a mix of oral and literate activity and visual materials. However, the focus on spoken language seems to us the most distinctive and yet currently under-recognised characteristic of ESOL classes. The emphasis on speaking affected decisions about methodology, as did our aim to use recorded classroom data that demonstrated effective practice in action. We used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in a multi-method approach.

From the initial design of the project, through the development and trialling of instruments and decisions about what qualitative data to collect, to modes of analysis and interpretation, we have related quantitative and qualitative paradigms and methodologies. Coding and statistical analysis were informed by qualitative research. For example, coding categories were validated by using expert practitioner focus groups and audio-recorded data from the ESOL Case Studies project (Roberts et al, 2004). Similarly, qualitative research drew on statistical findings; for example, the analysis of classroom data drew on descriptive statistics as well as qualitative data. Researchers were trained in all the quantitative and qualitative methods used.

As well as establishing, wherever possible, correlations between approaches and learner progress, we used descriptive statistics to describe the range of current practice. Learners were assessed with an adapted version of the Cambridge Key English Test. Classroom observations used three observational protocols: General Teaching Strategies (GTS), Strategies for Learner Involvement (SLI) and Specific Teaching Strategies (STS), which were substantially adapted from the Condelli instruments.

We observed and audio-recorded 40 classes on three occasions across diverse sites. These classes comprised an initial cohort of 509 students, of whom 256 completed both pre- and

post-assessments. The 256 comprise our core sample[2]. Of these students, 76 were interviewed using a bilingual methodology and ethnographic interviews were also carried out with the 40 classroom teachers. The teacher interviews were analysed using an interpretive procedure developed by Erickson (1986). The learner interviews were analysed using MaxQDA qualitative data analysis software. As well as statistical analysis, preliminary analysis was carried out on the 40 classes, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Ten case studies were selected from these, drawing on statistical results, ie high mean scores on general teaching and learner involvement strategies, extensive field notes, the interview data and classroom audio-recordings. (For a detailed discussion, see Annex 1 of the longer report of the project, forthcoming on www.nrdc.org.uk).

2.5 Criteria for assessing what is effective in ESOL teaching and learning

1. In addition to any correlational findings, our main quantitative criteria for judging effectiveness in ESOL teaching and learning are high scores on the scales used to measure GTS and SLI. A version of these strategies had already been validated by the Condelli study and the version used in our project further validated by expert practitioner focus groups and comparisons with the AECC and the ESOL case study project. These scores helped us to identify the ten case study classes of effective practice.

2. However, it is our view that there is more to effective practice than establishing correlations between teaching and assessment scores, and that we also need to consider effective practice qualitatively. We therefore draw on a corpus of 76 interviews with learners and 40 with teachers, as well as some micro-analysis of classroom interaction illustrated in the ten case studies.

3. Rather than opting for a 'one-size-fits-all' notion of effectiveness, we ask 'effective for whom, and in what circumstances?'

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2 This represents those students who were present on the days of the pre- and post-assessment, and does not necessarily represent drop-out from classes. Reasons for absence and drop-out are numerous, and include finding employment and changes of class level and time.

3 A world of difference: Local characteristics of the providers and the classes

3.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the range of ESOL provision represented in the project. The providing institutions, the classes and their characteristics are summarised, as are implications for policy and practice. The chapter also includes a table of background data on the classes in the study.

3.2 ESOL providers

ESOL classes are offered by colleges of further education (FE); private training providers; sixth form centres in schools; adult education colleges run by Local Authorities (LAs); voluntary and charity organisations; Jobcentre Plus; the Army; offenders' institutions; and employers, among others. The correlational aspect of the study required each of the 40 observed classes to have at least six attenders, and a total of at least 30 hours' tuition during the observed period, between the pre- and post-observation assessment dates. These criteria ruled out investigation of much work-based provision, for example, small and infrequent classes for migrant workers in rural areas.

The project had a North/South, metropolitan/regional split, observing 20 classes in Greater London and 20 in Yorkshire, Humberside and Lancashire. Participating classes took place at a number of centres in Greater London, in Central London and in Bromley, Croydon, Greenwich, Lewisham, Southall, Tooting and Waltham Forest. In the North of England, classes were observed in Leeds, Bradford, Hull, Oldham, Keighley, Dewsbury, Halifax, Shipley and Pudsey. Of the 40 providing institutions in the study, 33 were FE colleges, and 18 classes on the project took place at the main sites of FE colleges. Fourteen classes were in community centres, provided by FE colleges for students unable to attend classes at the main site of a college. Two were provided by LAs, three by charities, one was a Jobcentre Plus class, one was in a sixth form centre at a comprehensive school, and one was a work-based class held in a hotel. Table 3.1 at the end of this chapter provides a summary of the classes.

3.3 The range of ESOL classes

All 40 classes were at Entry level on the national qualifications framework, with 17 pre-entry/E1 classes, 11 E2 classes, three E3 classes, and nine mixed-level classes. This broad categorisation does not capture the variety between and within the classes. Six of the classes were for women only; two contained only men. Most classes were linguistically and culturally heterogeneous: in only five of the classes were there fewer than three different nationalities, and in nine classes there were ten or more nationalities. In 21 classes, students reported speaking eight or more languages between them. Education levels within classes also varied widely: 14 classes contained students who could not read and/or write in their first languages

alongside students with a tertiary-level education. Intensity of tuition ranged from two to 32 hours per week, and the number of different individual students attending observed lessons in the classes ranged from seven to 28. The classroom experience of teachers on the project varied greatly; while the average was ten years, there were relative newcomers and teachers with up to 30 years' experience. Most classes had oral communication as their main focus, though for some literacy or ICT were more central. It almost goes without saying that, with such a range across so many dimensions, the likelihood of any one particular approach to teaching being effective is remote.

3.4 The range of students' backgrounds in classes

The classes in the study varied greatly both in terms of the length of time their students had been in the UK, and in the extent to which classes were composed of members of the different categories outlined in Chapter 2. In only around nine classes were the students predominantly from established migrant communities, and in only two of these, both outside London, were there classes where all the students shared one similar linguistic and cultural background. At the other end of the spectrum, half a dozen classes were made up entirely of refugees and asylum-seekers who had been in the UK for only a matter of months. In a further five classes, though the students were mainly asylum-seekers and refugees, they had been in the UK for years rather than months. A large cluster of around 15 classes, mainly in London, comprised a mix of UK residents, asylum-seekers, refugees, members of settled communities, and EU citizens, some of whom had been in the UK for weeks and months only, and some for years.

So most classes were mixed in terms of students' backgrounds, particularly in London, reflecting the super-diversity of the capital itself. The consequence is that tutors have to cater for extraordinary heterogeneity in their classrooms.

3.5 Mixed-level classes

Although they may be categorised by providers in particular ways, all ESOL classes are, of course, mixed-level. Greater variation in level is likely to occur in community-based provision than at the main site of an FE college, simply because the range of classes is more restricted. In some cases, there may only be one or two classes in a centre. For nine of the classes in this study, the range of level is a noteworthy feature and is made explicit in the name of the class ('ESOL E1–2', for example). Seven of these classes ran in local community centres or FE 'off-site' centres of some kind; the others were the Jobcentre Plus class and the work-based class.

3.6 Community and constraints

Making a distinction between main site and community-based FE provision highlights the general differences between the two. It is not the case that all main site FE provision is well supported while all community provision is not. Yet many FE, local and charity community centres where ESOL classes happen are small, isolated and poorly resourced.

A policy decision to provide classes in community centres and workplaces may have

honourable motives. Yet structures to support tutors working in community-based environments are often lacking. ESOL tutors, even in the main sites of FE colleges, have line managers who are not ESOL specialists, and who do not understand the particular needs of the ESOL learner population. In a remote and isolated community centre, there may well be no management structure at all. This situation would not be of such concern if all tutors in community centres were experienced and could handle the difficult conditions. Yet, in many cases, the tutors in community centres on the project were the less experienced. An argument could be made that in the face of poor resources, unpredictable attendance patterns, frequent isolation from managerial support, and the attendant difficulties of running ESOL classes in poorly resourced centres, the more, rather than the less-experienced tutors should be teaching there.

Community-based provision is often referred to as 'off-site' or 'out in the community'. Such terminology reflects the marginalisation that can be felt by tutors and learners in community-based classes. Furthermore, for learners themselves, there are implications of learning in very small centres that might only house one or two ESOL classes. These concern the likelihood of being taught in a mixed-level class, as mentioned above, and the limited opportunities for progression. Students reach a certain point in their ESOL careers, and in some centres have nowhere else to progress to. There may be no higher-level class for them to attend at the centre, and they are either unwilling or unable to attend the mixed-gender classes of the appropriate level at the main site of the providing institution.

3.7 Summary of findings

■ Most classes on the project were provided by FE colleges, at their main sites or in local community centres of various kinds. Thus, they shared similarities with each other in terms of the characteristics common to the FE sector as a whole, such as audit regimes and inspection standards.

■ Classes are, on average, larger than literacy and numeracy classes and are enormously varied in terms of student background. It is very unlikely therefore that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will be the key to effective practice. The extraordinary heterogeneity of students in the majority of classes reflects the range of ESOL student backgrounds generally, and is a result of a number of historical, political, social and economic factors. The implication for teachers is that they have to cater for large, heterogeneous classes.

■ A major distinction can be made between main-site FE provision and that in community centres, though this is not the only pertinent dimension of difference.

■ In general, where there are constraints of some kind in the centre, the classes there are more likely to be mixed-level. Such constraints are more likely to occur in community centres. As well as being unable to provide a range of classes, difficulties in these community centre sites include: a perception of community-based provision as separate and 'other'; poor facilities and student support; lack of opportunities for student progression; and lack of robust management structures and support. Community-based tutors are often inexperienced, rather than the experienced tutors who would be better equipped to work in such centres, given the work conditions and constraints.

The impact of these factors for tutors are discussed in Chapters 6 and 8; implications for learners appear in Chapter 4.

Table 3.1 **Summary of classes on the ESOL Effective Practice Project**

Class ID	Centre	Type of providing institution and centre[1]	Level and type of class	Teacher	Hours per week	Total no. of learners[2]	Gender (F/M)	Nationalities	Languages spoken
1	Barnaby Road Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 2 ESOL	Yelena	6	15	5/10	9	8
2	Henshaw Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 1 ESOL	Tom	4	12	10/2	5	5
3	Borderlands Centre	FE College, local community centre	Entry 1–2 ESOL	Zeta	12	27	18/9	10	10
4	Campbell Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 2 ESOL for women	Salima	7.5	9	9/0	2	3
5	Eldon Street Centre	FE College, local community centre	Entry 1–2 ESOL for women	Patricia	4	18	18/0	2	4
6	Campbell Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 1 ESOL for men	Martin	7.5	13	0/13	7	6
8	Buxton Street Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 1 ESOL literacy	Marjorie	7.5	14	9/5	6	6
9	Naylor Street Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL with numeracy and IT	Jack	16	20	12/8	11	9
11	Highfield Centre	FE College, 6th form centre at main site	Entry 2 ESOL for 16–19	Marie	20	22	6/16	7	9
13	East Park Muslim Women's Centre	FE College, local community centre for Muslim women	Entry 1 ESOL for women	Catrin	5	10	10/0	9	9
14	Harrington Centre	LA Adult Education College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL	Sheena	7	12	11/1	8	8
15	Holly Park Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 3 ESOL	Josie	7.5	23	18/5	10	10
16	Albany Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL	Michael	16	17	13/4	9	8
17	Henry Road Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL	Dina	12.5	20	14/6	9	8
18	Panjabi Centre	FE College, college community centre	Entry 1 ESOL	Carl	9	16	6/10	11	8
19	Jubilee Drive	FE College, main site	'Pre-entry' ESOL literacy	Kelly	8	14	4/10	5	6

Class ID	Centre	Type of providing institution and centre[1]	Level and type of class	Teacher	Hours per week	Total no. of learners[2]	Gender [F/M]	Nationalities	Languages spoken
20	Gladstone	FE College, Building	Entry 2–3 college community centre	Hema ESOL for 16–19	4	12	5/7	6	4
21	Tarbiyat Centre	FE College, local Muslim education centre	Entry 2–3 ESOL for women	Fatima	4	20	20/0	2	3
22	Overton Street Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Harriet	13	12	10/2	9	7
23	Abbey Centre	Charitable trust, community education centre	Entry 1 ESOL	Ike	11	28	10/18	6	7
24	Prestbury Lane Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Alex	10	13	4/9	3	3
26	Vine Street	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Jenny	10	13	1/12	8	9
27	Empire Park	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Vanessa	12	13	1/12	5	4
28	Taraqqi Centre	FE College, local community centre	Entry 1–2 ESOL evening class	Bill	7	9	1/8	2	3
29	Blackburn Hill Centre	FE College, local community centre	Entry 1 ESOL speaking and listening for men	Marianna	7	13	0/13	4	4
30	Sergeant Street	Private training provider, training centre	Entry 1–2 Jobcentre Plus	Nasim	32	14	8/6	9	9
31	Edutech/Wen Hua	Educational charity, cultural centre for Chinese women	Entry 1–2 ESOL for women	Maureen, Manjit	2	11	11/0	1	1
32	Airdrie Street	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Dora	10	23	18/5	8	8
33	St Paul's Church	FE College, church hall	Entry 1–2 ESOL	Leanne	5	15	12/3	5	6
34	Bower Grove	FE College, main site	Entry 3 ESOL evening class	Sarah	5	23	6/17	12	12
35	Childsbeck Post-16 Centre	Comprehensive School, sixth form ESOL centre	Entry 2 ESOL for 16–18	Alice	16	16	5/11	7	8
36	Hereward Building	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL literacy	Linda	16	25	14/11	7	6

Class ID	Centre	Type of providing institution and centre[1]	Level and type of class	Teacher	Hours per week	Total no. of learners[2]	Gender (F/M)	Nationalities	Languages spoken
37	Bambridge Centre	Catholic educational charity, education centre for women	Entry 2 ESOL speaking for women	Susanna	10	16	16/0	11	10
38	Villa Moor	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL literacy	Jane	8	16	15/1	34	4
39	Blenheim Building	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Dorothy	8	16	9/7	9	9
40	Lawley	FE College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL	Matthew	14	18	14/4	9	9
41	Northfield Hotel	FE College/ Hotel, work-based	Entry 2–3 ESOL	Liz	3	7	3/4	4	5
42	Tenshill Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 1 ESOL	Rachel	12	19	16/3	11	8
43	Chatton Centre	FE College, main site	Entry 2 ESOL	Paul	10	17	13/4	10	9
44	Woodland Way Community Centre	LA, community centre	Entry 3 ESOL	Carol	6	22	18/4	8	8
Totals						**653**	**393/260**		

1 A distinction is made between college community centres which are run by FE colleges, and local community centres where the class is provided by FE colleges but the centre is owned and run by a different organisation.
2 The column 'Total number of learners' is the figure for the total number of different individual students who attended each observed class. The numbers from whom biographical data were collected, of whom took the pre- and post-observation assessments, and of whom form the sample for the statistical aspect of this study, are lower.

4 The learners and their experience

4.1 Introduction

The learners in the EEPP study are notable for their diversity. As a group, they share most of
the features of 'superdiversity' (Vertovec, 2006), in that, although some share a place of birth
or first language, there are huge differences in terms of social class, previous education, level
of literacy, gender, age, political and regional affiliation and immigration status. This chapter
describes some aspects of the heterogeneity in ESOL and discusses the implications for
teaching and learning.

4.2 Data collection

The 509 learners completed a form providing information such as their age, gender, country
of origin, languages and previous education and employment. We also carried out interviews
with 76 learners, roughly two from each class, using a bilingual methodology which meant
that people with very low levels of English were able to act as informants[3]. The interviews
were coded and analysed using qualitative data analysis software (MaxQDA). There were 11
broad codes and 86 sub-codes which covered biographical details, formal and informal
English language learning, obstacles and difficulties, family and social networks and
aspirations for the future. These form the basis of the sections in this chapter. (For more on
bilingual methodology, see Annex 1 of the longer report, forthcoming on www.nrdc.org.uk).

Data from the learner information form
Table 4.1 shows statistics on the gender, age, educational background and current
employment status of the 509 informants. We have no statistics on asylum, because we
deemed it too intrusive to ask learners directly (but see Section 4.3 below). However, the
percentage of people in the EEPP data set from countries such as Somalia, Turkey, Iran, Iraq
and Afghanistan align with Home Office statistics, which show these countries in the top six
from which asylum-seekers in the UK originate (Vertovec, 2006). In line with the average age
of current new migrants to the UK (Kyambi, 2005), most learners in this study (just under 80
per cent) are below the age of 40 and are therefore of primary working age.

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3 The 76 were chosen because they were active participants in class, and where a suitable bilingual interpreter was available.

Table 4.1 **Statistics for gender, age, literacy, higher education and current employment status**

		%
Gender	Male	36.8
	Female	63.2
Age group	16–19	14.9
	20–29	34.3
	30–39	29.7
	40–49	14.1
	50–59	5.5
	over 60	1.5
Can read in L1		88.8
Can write in L1		82.3
University-level education		12.1
Currently in employment		20.5

Countries of birth

The learners in the study came from 58 different countries of birth. The ten most common are shown in Table 4.2. Around 60 per cent of the learners as a whole were from these ten countries.

Table 4.2 **Most common nationalities**

Country	Frequency	%
Pakistan	62	12.2
Somalia	54	10.6
Turkey	36	7.1
Bangladesh	29	5.7
India	22	4.3
Angola	21	4.1
Congo	21	4.1
Sri Lanka	20	3.9
Iran	17	3.3
Iraq	17	3.3

This table shows country of birth but does not show current nationality, ie some of the informants have British nationality or nationality of another EU member state. Several, mainly refugees, are 'secondary migrants' and have lived for long periods of time in different places before coming to the UK. The high number of people from Pakistan is due to the fact that they are a large group in the Yorkshire towns we researched; this picture would be different in other parts of England. In fact, it is notable that there is no one dominant group, a reflection of changing immigration patterns, the policies of dispersal and ever-changing ESOL classrooms.

Languages

The learners report a total of 50 languages spoken as their first language. Table 4.3 shows the ten most common first languages.

Table 4.3 **Most common first languages**

L1	Frequency	%
Somali	50	9.8
Urdu	50	9.8
Turkish	33	6.5
Bengali	30	5.9
Portuguese	29	5.7
French	26	5.1
Kurdish	25	4.9
Spanish	23	4.5
Panjabi	21	4.1
Farsi	20	3.9

The full picture of language use amongst the EEPP learners is more complex than these figures show. The entry for Kurdish includes the varieties spoken in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Pakistanis identify themselves as speakers of either Urdu, Panjabi or both, Urdu being the national unifying language in Pakistan, and Panjabi being spoken mainly in the home (Alladina and Edwards, 1991). Multilingualism and multi-literacy is taken for granted by many of our informants: a student from Angola, for example, initially reported on his learner information form that he spoke only Portuguese but his interview revealed that he is also a user of French, Lingala and Kicongo. People use several languages, some as lingua francas, and code switch and 'cross' between them (Rampton, 1995) as a matter of course.

Educational background and literacy levels

The statistics indicate the amount of schooling learners received before coming to the UK but they do not enable us to compare the quality or type of education. The average length of schooling is between eight and nine years but around 160 people reported less than eight, including over 40 who went to school for less than four years. At the other end of the scale, 12 per cent have had a university education. Unsurprisingly, the picture in terms of literacy skills is also mixed: Table 4.1 shows that over ten per cent said they could not read and write in their first language. This includes a greater proportion of people who have been in the UK for longer than five years (who we refer to as 'long-term residents'). Of these, there are more women than men. The implications of this for ESOL provision are discussed fully in the next chapter, which discusses learners' progress.

Length of time in the UK

The statistics show that most learners in the study have been in the UK for between one and six years, the mean average being just under five years. However, there are a total of 103 people who are long-term residents. The reasons why people may not acquire English despite long-term residence in the UK are discussed later in this chapter.

4.3 Themes from the interviews

Despite the extreme heterogeneity of the learners, there are themes that occur to varying degrees in most of the interviews.

Gender

In this study, around 63 per cent of the learners are women. The availability of childcare is a

prime concern for parents – usually mothers – who are responsible for young children and who wish to study ESOL. Many women said they had been prevented from attending classes because they did not have access to adequate and appropriate childcare during lesson time. Where a crèche is available, it is often understaffed, oversubscribed, or otherwise inadequate. Some informants talk explicitly about not being able to come to class when their children were young: '*Maybe if I had studied when I arrived, if the kids hadn't been so little I would speak good English. I always liked studying, yes. It was because of the kids.*' (Ecuadorian woman, London). This means that their learning happens in a piecemeal way over a longer period of time. In addition to this, classes specifically for women or men tend to be provided at the lower levels only. The lack of availability of an all-women class at the appropriate level further prevents some women from progressing at a pace which fits their ability and potential.

Gender also contributes to low literacy, compounding other factors such as interrupted schooling due to war or poverty:

> *They did not send me because there wasn't a secondary school in my village and my mother told my father that I was a girl who can't travel to the town every time. "Something would happen to her", she used to say. And my father accepted it. We did not have enough money. We were quite poor.* (Turkish woman, London)

Many women interviewed for the EEPP are determined that their daughters and sons will have more opportunities, and are thus heavily invested in their ESOL classes and their children's education:

> *Even in England, most Turkish people believe that girls should not study. I want my children to study; I do not want them to become one of my kind. I do not let them do any housework. I really want them to study.* (Turkish woman, London)

Migration and settlement
ESOL classes are made up of people from many situations, but a central issue for ESOL is asylum. Several informants in our study were waiting for a decision on their claims while they dealt with the aftermath of war and other strife. This combined stress is likely to have a detrimental effect on learning (Murray, 2005; Pitt, 2005). Haxhi, an asylum seeker from Kosovo, has been waiting for a decision on his asylum claim for five years. Meanwhile, despite being a qualified plumber, he has no right to work, cannot choose where he lives and receives a reduced level of state benefits. He has also suffered harassment from locals. All this is compounded by Haxhi's fear that he may be deported, which is not eased by the fact that two members of his class had their asylum applications refused during the course of this study (see Bloch and Shuster, 2005):

> *I don't know what is going to happen. I have a family here and I want a better life for them but it does not depend on me. Today, I am here in college and at midnight the police might knock on my door and tell me to leave this country and go back to Kosovo.* (Haxhi, Bradford)

There are some classes that are almost entirely composed of people living with similar levels of fear and stress (see Chapter 3). Those who have had positive decisions on their asylum applications have a higher degree of stability but must still deal with the aftermath of the events that led them to seek asylum in the first place.

Employment

One of the most pressing motives for people to invest in learning English is that of employment. Home Office statistics show that migrants, especially from 'non-white' backgrounds, fare much worse in terms of unemployment and low pay than non-migrants (Vertovec, 2006). Notably, those who fare worst of all originate from Somalia, Angola, Iran, Albania and Ethiopia, all countries that are represented in the EEPP data set.

Learners have a wide range of qualifications, skills, knowledge and prior experience – their 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986). Our interviewees include skilled tradespeople and professionals, such as doctors, teachers and accountants, as well as people with lower levels of skills. Unlike other *Skills for Life* learners, many ESOL learners are employed below their professional level and may remain in this position for years to come. Particularly striking is the example of a Russian theatre nurse who, as an asylum seeker, is not allowed to work and whose qualifications are not accepted by the NHS. She is preparing to follow a course to transfer her skills and will have spent seven years in the UK before she starts work in the lowest rung of her profession (see Cooke, 2006, for more on this issue).

These informants accept that they have to downsize their employment aspirations, but still face linguistic barriers in seeking a job below their professional level. Others are facing unemployment after years in the local UK workforce. Many people know what they wish to do in terms of work but do not have a clear idea what might be required of them in the modern UK workplace. Research by Roberts and Campbell (2006) shows that they also lack the wherewithal to negotiate linguistic gate-keeping procedures such as interviews, which present a major barrier to second language speakers and contribute to high levels of unemployment amongst linguistic minority jobseekers. Our interview data suggest that general ESOL classes, although effective in themselves, are at present unable to respond in every way to the complexity of requirements amongst people wishing to compete for jobs and training in the UK workforce.

Access to English-speaking communities

Many ESOL learners are marginalised because of their status as ethnic and linguistic minorities and/or because they are prohibited from employment and full citizenship. Related to this is lack of access to the target language. In contradiction to current media and public discourse, these learners are committed to learning English and believe it is essential for their wellbeing and success. They are keen to meet English speakers and to practise English, and are frustrated at their limited opportunities to do so. For this reason, ESOL lessons have a very important place in the lives of these informants. The learners themselves give various reasons why their access to English speakers is so problematic, and why people might not acquire English, even after long periods of residency in the UK:

■ Working in ethnic work units or jobs at which they only have to speak their dominant language: *'I had worked in a takeaway which is also owned by our people. There I could not speak English which I think was a great disadvantage to me because I could not learn any English there.'* (Pakistani man, Leeds).

■ Working in a job where they do not have to speak much at all in any language: *'In housekeeping, it's quite boring: you come to work, take your mops and go up to clean without seeing almost anyone.'* (Lithuanian hotel worker, London).

■ Being unemployed: *'Without working, I feel useless, not worth anything. I am doing nothing but housework.'* (Turkish woman, London).

■ Having no contact at all with speakers of English, because of isolation or because of living in a

community big enough to get all their needs met: *'I do not use any English at all. I do not talk in English with my children because they do not like my English. Maybe I say "Good morning" to my neighbours. I do not use when I am shopping because I do my shopping from Turkish shops.'* (Turkish woman, London).

■ Local people are unfriendly, unavailable or unapproachable: *'I don't avoid or do it on purpose; it is that I don't live around English speakers; there are no ways to mingle with people, you have to know them, most people in this country are normally conservative.'* (Somali woman, London).

■ Shyness: *'I remember someone saying to me "You, what you have to do is go to the street and ask questions (laughing), anything, where is this street, where is the other?" and I say that I can't even do that in Spanish…I understand that it is my own problem as well, and the way I am, but if I can't do something in Spanish it's even more difficult in English.'* (Spanish woman, London).

There are some poignant comments from learners who yearn to have contact with English-speaking people: *'Our other neighbours are a younger husband and wife. I would really like to go and talk to them to get to know them … if they ever have time then it would be nice to just sit with them for half an hour and have a chat.'* (Iranian woman, London). One learner describes making friends with a local person almost with a sense of bewilderment:

> *One day she came to my home. That time we were just saying hello to each other. She was showing me a bunch of keys. I thought she found them and thought that they were mine. I showed her my key and told her that I did not lose my keys. She was still trying to tell me something I did not understand. In the end, she gave me the keys and left. I was so scared; I did not know what to do. I waited until my kids came home. I told them that she gave her keys to me and wanted me to give them to her children when they come from school. I was thinking probably the kids forgot their keys and she wanted me to give them to them. My kids took the key to their home and came back with the keys. They were smiling. They told me that she gave her spare keys to me just in case if she loses the others. I felt proud because she trusted to us. Since then we are good friends.* (Turkish woman, London)

Everyday experiences of low-level speakers of English
Another reason for many to invest in learning is the day-to-day difficulty of being a low-level speaker of English. Some talk of fear, isolation and a feeling of disadvantage or incompleteness. Institutions such as the Job Centre, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and banks loom large; some of the stories told by learners are of racism, hostility and miscommunication (Pastor and De Fina, 2005). Unequal encounters of this kind are not at all conducive environments for language learning (Bremer et al, 1996). A common feeling is dependence on others to help with bureaucratic encounters; many talk of their language learning achievements in terms of breaking this dependency:

> *Do you know why I am so anxious to learn English? Well let me tell you why. When we came to this country I couldn't speak any English. We had many appointments because of our immigration matters. My wife has this relative who used to come to help us by interpreting. One day, we had this very important appointment and I asked him if he could come. He told me that I should learn English because he didn't want to come to our appointments any more. He came that day but I felt really bad. I felt broken-hearted and disappointed and embarrassed. On that very same day, I told myself that I will learn English whatever happens. I have written a big note on my wardrobe about what happened on that day. Every time I opened it to change my clothes, I saw the note and here I am. I don't need anybody to translate for me now. Even sometimes I go to help some people by translating for them.'* (Turkish man, London)

As well as causing day-to-day stress, learning a new language and culture can challenge established identity on a profound level (Hoffman, 1989). Andrei, a Russian man from Leeds, describes the anxiety of never being able to be 'fully himself' in a language other than his own:

> *If we were sitting on the bench like now and wished to talk about life, I think we would not be able to speak English. We would wish to talk about nature, flowers, art, pictures, images, impressions … . I am sure we will not manage to talk about them. But it is a very important piece of my life, and all that is in Russian. How can I translate it into a different language? What about my feelings and the like?*

See also Chapter 8, in which we discuss the importance of treating ESOL learners as adults with adult concerns beyond the purely functional and instrumental.

4.4 Learners on their ESOL classrooms and their progress

Our interviews include many comments on aspects of formal language learning, such as grammar, reading, writing and pedagogic activities. Unsurprisingly, these are as diverse as the learners themselves. However, most of the learners in our study made progress on the EEPP assessments (see Chapter 5), and many of them attribute this to their ESOL classes. They almost always articulate their sense of progress and achievement by describing situations that they can now cope with which were impossible for them before. This seems to give a sense of confidence that in itself motivates them to learn more. Examples of this are:

■ Work: people are now able to communicate with customers or talk to their managers: *'Before when [non-Chinese] customers come I would say "Just a minute" and run to my wife and tell her…but now I dare. I stand there and ask what he wants… blah blah.'* (Chinese man, Leeds).

■ Training: some have been able to find out what they need to do to retrain in their professions: *'There is a course…they assess the business that you want to start and so on, what you have to do, what tax you have to pay, what type of business you want, they orient you more or less.'* (Colombian woman, London).

■ Dealing with health professionals, bureaucrats, banks and so on, thus no longer needing the help of interpreters, which many find uncomfortable and intrusive, especially in health-care settings: *'If it something simple, I go alone. I go, I go alone and I say to the doctor where it hurts, and for how long, yes, I defend myself.'* (Ecuadorian woman, London).

■ Dealing with Home Office communiqués and lawyers: *'Whenever I received letters, I just took them to the [community] association and they helped me do everything. I used to go there every day but now I don't go that often.'* (Chinese woman, Leeds).

■ Speaking to teachers at children's schools: *'Often I didn't go to meetings at school or I asked somebody else if they could speak for me. It is difficult when you come here and don't know how to speak. Now that I know a little it is good and I am happy.'* (Madeiran woman, London).

■ Making friends and participating in local communities: *'My neighbours are mainly English people. We go shopping together. I use my husband's car to drive them to wholesale shops to buy cheaper things.'* (Chinese woman, Leeds).

■ Communicating with their own children: *'Since I have learned English and I can talk broken English, they sit and talk with me and look happy.'* (Pakistani man, Bradford).

The classroom is the only place in their daily lives where most people speak English; probably for this reason they place a high value on speaking in class. They tend to value small group

and pair work because they can learn from and with each other (see Chapter 8): '*Here you can practise the language with your classmates because, as I said, you talk more.*' (Ecuadorian woman, London). As well as the cognitive benefits of learning in a group, ESOL classes fulfil a very important social function; learners form friendships that extend outside the classroom, sometimes with people whom they may never have had the chance to meet:

> *It's particularly good to learn amongst so many different cultures and nationalities. When I first arrived here, this was very interesting for me – to see so many different cultures and people from different parts of the world in one place.* (Iranian woman, London)

Heterogeneity in the classroom

Many ESOL classes are extremely heterogeneous in terms of learner educational backgrounds (see Chapter 3). This woman, who has little experience of formal learning, is clearly unsuited to an approach that relies heavily on grammatical explanations and metalanguage:

> *When they say past and present ... I don't understand ... what is past, present and something else past present, something you did before ... In the past and present. And two together present continuous. It's very difficult. I can't understand. Very difficult. They should make it easier for people to understand more.* (Yemeni woman, Leeds)

The same learner has a better level of speaking than many of her classmates, but has been placed in a level based on her low level of literacy, not her oracy – she has what is known in colleges and other learning institutions as a 'spiky profile' (see Glossary).

On the other hand, some learners have learned languages through grammar and formal instruction and have completed post-compulsory education. These students have a developed range of study skills and resources and, for them, returning to study as adults is more familiar than it is for those who have no or little experience of formal schooling. Some of these students struggle when they find themselves in classes with people from their home countries whom they regard as being less educated than themselves: '*They were working in the fields picking tobacco. They never went to school, of course it is going to be boring for them, but for me it is just the opposite. I have never worked in the fields; I was always a student since a very young age.*' (Greek/Turkish woman, London). Others take the mixed-level as a natural part of group learning: '*There are some people from my country. They do not know as much as I do. I help them most of the time...I do not want them to feel [embarrassed] in front of the other students who are from other countries. That is the reason why I help them.*' (young Turkish man, London).

Coping with a high degree of diversity is part of the expertise of the skilled teacher and also part of what makes ESOL an enjoyable subject for many teachers. There are, however, some scenarios which might be beyond the scope of the general ESOL class. The most obvious and serious challenge of the mixed-level class is when people with no or low levels of literacy are placed in classes with people who are literate, such as the Yemeni woman in the example above. Many non-literate learners are still placed in classes without literacy support, or without a teacher trained in literacy instruction, and spend years making little or no progress. This low literate learner contrasts his experience in a general ESOL class with that of his current dedicated literacy class in which his needs are finally being met:

> *When I came, to be frank I wanted to stop coming to the classes ... because the teacher*

would be telling us something and trying to put something into our heads to make us learn
as much as she could teach us, but why didn't we understand even though she tried hard?
… that was worrying me a lot. But when Linda takes us you feel like you can study in her
class for a lifetime. (Sri Lankan Tamil man, London)

Individualised learning, 'needs' and differentiation
Colleges have various ways of dealing with the issue of mixed levels and 'spiky profiles'. Many
of these place responsibility with teachers, who are expected to show on their lesson plans
that they are 'differentiating' between learners of different levels, and to cater to each
individual's learning through an ILP, which is intended to help learners meet their language
learning goals through a series of SMART[4] targets. The practice of relying on within-group
differentiation, thus placing the onus onto teachers, however, might be allowing planners to
avoid looking at more rigorous and effective ways they might cater for the differing needs of
all their learners. Indeed, it might be that, rather than expecting teachers to 'differentiate',
the needs of learners might sometimes be better met through other means, such as high
quality bilingual careers advice.

There is a tension too for many teachers and learners between the group process and the
need to focus on individual language learning goals (see Dudley, Cooke and Brazier,
forthcoming). Although some EEPP learners appreciate one-to-one time with their teachers,
only one explicitly mentions the use of ILPs. ILPs are meant to help learners achieve their
short-term goals but students often have difficulty talking about their short-term linguistic
goals (especially in English) despite having very clear ideas about why they are learning
English and what they hope to gain from their investment, as our interviews show. Their
broad, long-term aims have to be translated into short-term goals and turned into specific,
analytic language targets, a task which, our interview data suggest, can be challenging for
teachers and bewildering for students.

The evidence from our interviews with 76 ESOL learners suggests that ESOL classrooms are
more heterogeneous than ever, itself a reflection of new migration patterns since the 1990s. It
also suggests that diversity, variability and instability is a fact of life in ESOL classrooms.

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4 SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-related (from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk)

5 Learners' progress

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents descriptive and correlational findings, and their implications, regarding the measurement of progress according to the ESOL Effective Practice Project speaking assessment and a number of learner and class-level variables. The chapter starts with an account of learners' overall progress according to the assessment, and goes on to give details of learner variables, then class-level variables, and their correlations with progress. Teaching strategies employed in ESOL lessons and their correlations with progress are presented and discussed in Chapter 7.

5.2 Assessment and learners' progress

Assessment

The project needed a test that would be a robust measure of learner progress, yet that was calibrated finely enough to measure progress across relatively short periods of time. To that end, in collaboration with the testing organisation Cambridge ESOL, we designed and implemented a speaking test based on the Cambridge ESOL Key English Test (KET), from which the scores for correlations derive.

The EEPP test is in two parts: in Part 1, each of two or three learners in turn interacts with an interlocutor, giving factual information of a personal kind. In Part 2, the test-takers interact with each other, using prompt cards to simulate questions and answers related to daily and personal life. The EEPP test was adapted to take into account the backgrounds of the learners involved. For example, it does not ask the sensitive question 'Why did you come to the UK?'

A lower-level test was designed for the students who have language skills that are lower than those required for the second part of the test. The primary rationale for devising a lower-level test was to avoid conflating a speaking assessment with a literacy assessment, given that many learners on the study had minimal skills in either literacy or oral communication. The lower-level test is based on the KET, with certain modifications: (1) an omission of the second part of the test; (2) a corresponding extension of the first part; and (3) a re-wording of the level descriptors to reflect the lower level of expected achievement.

The test was administered twice, as a pre- and post-observation assessment. Different forms of Part 2 of the test were used in the two administrations. Assessment was carried out according to four five-point scales. The assessor graded the performance of the learners in the areas of (a) grammar and vocabulary, (b) pronunciation, and (c) interactive communication. The interlocutor awarded a mark out of five for (d) global achievement. The marks were added together to give a total score out of 20.

The time period between assessments ranged from six to 25 weeks. This reflects the variation in the length of time for which the classes were observed. For some classes, the three or four observations took place over just one term, and for some they stretched over three terms. Further variables include the number of hours a week each class was taught (see 'Class-level

variables' below), and patterns of attendance within and between classes (see 'Learner variables' below). Hence, there is need for caution when drawing conclusions about practice from pre- and post-observation test results.

Learners' progress
Four hundred and forty students in the 40 classes on the project underwent the first assessment. Of those, 256 also underwent the second assessment. These 256 students comprise the core sample for the correlational aspects of the study. There was a rise of two points in the mean totals of students between the two assessments, from 13.5 to 15.5 out of 20. This difference is highly significant ($p \leftarrow 0.001$). The rise in total scores of the four sub-scales between the assessments was also highly significant ($p \leftarrow 0.001$ in each case). So, overall, students on the project made progress between the times of the assessments. On a class-by-class level, mean scores improved in all but four classes. In these four classes, only a small number of the students who had been present at the time of the first assessment remained in the class until the time of the second assessment. In informal discussions with class tutors, test scores were found to correspond with the tutors' sense of the learners' progress.

5.3 Learner variables: Correlations with progress

Which learner-related variables have an impact on progress? A multiple regression was conducted in order to determine the best combination of learner variables for predicting progress according to the assessment. Several combinations of characteristics were tested, including gender, age, employment status, ability to read or write in the first or expert language (L1), and years of schooling. None of these factors in and of themselves were found to make a difference to progress. The only factors found to be significant were the learners' actual attendance rates, and the length of time they had already spent in the UK at the point of the study.

Attendance rates ranged from 16 to 100 per cent, with a mean average of 74 per cent. The multiple regression allows us to examine the influence of each factor while taking into account the effects of other factors in the model. Accordingly, we are able to state that, other things being equal, attendance correlates positively but only weakly with progress ($p = 0.048$).

The length of time that students had already spent in the UK by the start of the study has a significant negative correlation with progress in the assessment, with all other factors taken into account. The shorter the time that students have been in the UK, the more likely they are to obtain a higher score, taking into account their pre-assessment score and attendance rate. In short, more recent arrivals in the UK are seen to have made greater progress according to the test than longer-term residents.

Because length of time in the UK appeared to be an important predictor of change in total scores, this variable was investigated further. Taking the data from all students who completed the relevant section in the learner information form (N = 468), we split the sample into two groups, a recently settled group who have been in the UK for up to five years (365 students, or 78 per cent) and a long-term resident group who have been in the country longer than five years (103 students, 22 per cent). We compared the two groups across a number of variables, in order to establish if and how they differed, both demographically and in terms of the type of classes they attended.

There are salient and statistically significant differences between these two groups. There are proportionally more men and more young students in the recently settled group. A higher proportion of long-term resident learners reported that they could not read or write in their first language. The groups also differ significantly in terms of mean years of schooling reported, with an average of 9.15 years for the recently settled group and 7.13 years for the longer-term residents. The latter group are also significantly more likely to be attending non-intensive courses of eight hours per week or fewer.

These differences point to reasons why levels of progress vary between the groups. People who have been in the UK for longer are more likely to be older and to have had less experience of formal education as children. Both these reasons might affect progress. Evidence from second language acquisition research suggests that age makes a difference; there is a cut-off point that divides younger from older language learners, and older learners have to find strategies that compensate for the loss of the language learning mechanisms of the young (Long, 1990). People come to ESOL later in life for a variety of reasons. Many wish they could have started earlier but were prevented by patterns of work or childcare. Those learners who received little or no schooling as children have a further disadvantage in adult ESOL classes. In general, people who have experience of school recognise and are able to operate within the artificiality of the classroom situation (Luria, 1976). In contrast, adults with little school experience are less able to fully understand the pedagogical aspect of classroom interaction (see Chapter 4). Finally, attending a low intensity course may have some effect on progress, as we see below. Such courses often occur in community centres where provision may not be as intensive as at main-site centres (see Chapter 3).

The implications are that both recent arrivals and long-term residents need to have their ESOL learning supported, but in different ways. A large proportion of the ESOL population are recent arrivals making fast progress. Continued support in terms of accessible and appropriate ESOL provision is needed if they are to continue to learn enough English to progress into other education and training and into employment, with the attendant social and economic benefits this might bring.

Some longer-term residents may also need support in their learning, but of a different kind. The research has seen an impact on practice regarding students with low levels of literacy, many of whom have not been to school as children. Qualitative findings from the project show that ESOL tutors and learners become frustrated with slow progress, but lack an understanding of the influence on progress of little prior schooling and no L1 literacy. Behind the familiar talk of spiky profiles lies the extreme difficulty that many adult ESOL learners experience in learning a new language as an adult, and in particular acquiring second language (L2) literacy without a foundational knowledge of L1 literacy. There is a parallel difficulty in that ESOL tutors have to address the learning needs of these students in mixed classes and without specialist knowledge of L2 adult literacy teaching. Many students need intensive literacy tuition; the implication for providers is that, at the very least, specialist training in beginner L2 adult literacy teaching is warranted.

5.4 Class-level variables: Correlations with progress

This section presents summary statistics on class-level variables other than the general and specific teaching strategies and learner involvement, which appear in Chapter 7.

Learners per class

The average class size on the project, derived from the attendance figures noted by the observers, was 9.8 learners, ranging from four to 18. The correlation between number of learners in each class and difference in assessment scores was very low and was not statistically significant, but it was nonetheless positive. People might expect that smaller classes would lead to better results. These figures suggest that this might not be the case. The figures also support qualitative evidence from tutors and learners that classes that are either too big or too small are not liked.

Hours per week

The average weekly hours were 9.6, ranging from two to 32. The figure here does not account for fluctuations in attendance, and should be seen as an indication of the intensity of provision, rather than the amount of hours individuals actually spend in the class. A moderate positive correlation between number of hours per week and mean gain in total scores was found; this coefficient almost reached statistical significance. In one class, the Jobcentre Plus class, students are obliged to attend for 32 hours a week, yet there was a low total score difference. That class was excluded from these calculations as an outlier.

Lesson length

The mean lesson length was two hours and 15 minutes. The correlation between lesson length and difference in total scores on the two assessments was negative, but low and not significant. No firm conclusions regarding an optimum lesson length can be drawn here.

Course length

The total number of hours for all classes ranged from 30 to 320 hours, with a mean of 122 hours. This figure represents the total number of hours taught between the times of the pre- and post-observation assessment, rather than overall course length. Thus, although we can state that the correlation between total number of hours and gain in total scores between the assessment times was very low and non-significant, no particular conclusions can be drawn from this finding. The difficulty lies with the fact that there is no uniform definition of what a course actually is. For some, it is a learner's period of ESOL study over the time they are at a centre; for others it is a year, a term, or a semester. Some other providers divide the academic calendar into units of a certain number of weeks for funding rather than learning purposes; these units then become the 'course'.

5.5 Conclusion

■ Overall, students made progress according to the project's pre- and post-observation assessment.
■ Learners' attendance correlates positively but weakly with progress.
■ The length of time that learners have been in the UK correlates significantly and negatively with progress, ie the shorter time that students have been in the UK, the greater progress they made on the test. That is to say, newer arrivals make faster progress on the whole than long-term residents.
■ Differences between recent arrivals and long-term residents point to possible reasons for variation in progress between the groups. The long-term residents are older, have less experience of schooling and lower first language literacy levels, and are more likely to be attending less intensive courses, any of which factors can affect rate of progress.
■ The implication for more recent arrivals is that they should continue to be provided with
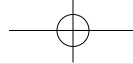
appropriate ESOL lessons. The implication for at least some long-term residents is that they need intensive and specialised L2 literacy provision.

■ Weak but positive correlations can only hint at conclusions regarding progress with reference to class-level variables. It may be that there are optimum class sizes, lesson lengths and hours of tuition per week that are neither too great nor too small.

Other variables that relate to teacher practices are examined quantitatively and qualitatively in Chapters 7 and 8.
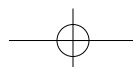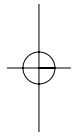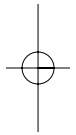
6 Take 40 teachers: ESOL teachers' working lives

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we examine data from 40 in-depth interviews conducted with the ESOL teachers whose lessons we observed. They shed light on effective classrooms 'from the chalkface', as well giving insights into the effects on practice of broader, institutional factors such as the ESOL curriculum and college structures.

6.2 The teachers: Facts and figures

The teachers had a diverse range of experience and duties, including two published materials writers, several who are experts in ESOL literacy, some with managerial and curriculum responsibilities and others who are on hourly contracts. Fifty-six per cent of the teachers are part-time, some of these being hourly-paid. The average number of years of professional experience was just over ten, ranging from under a year to 30 years. The average number of years that teachers had been teaching at their current institution was just over four, ranging from under a year to over 20. Over 70 per cent had completed the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (AECC) training and 60 per cent had undertaken other LLN training. The backgrounds of the teachers include those who have spent a lot of time teaching English overseas and those who have always worked in a British ESOL setting.

6.3 Changing contexts for ESOL teaching and learning

The interviews show a constant tension between the teachers' understandings of their learners on the one hand, and their perceptions of the policy demands and audit culture of FE and ESOL on the other. The teachers reported an enormous increase in the paperwork requirements of their jobs, ILPs being particularly contentious. They are seen as a good idea by some. Sarah, for instance, points to their value in terms of the fact that learners get one-to-one attention in tutorial time. Opposition centres on the amount of extra work that ILPs involve and the fact that at lower levels they are very difficult to implement. Many teachers were of the view that ILPs do not work, especially with students at Entry levels 1 and 2. Some, like Linda, are outraged by the lack of fitness for purpose; others, like Michael, understand the reasons behind ILPs in relation to funding but find them impossible to transmit to students. Matthew says that learners do not believe in them because teachers themselves do not. Susanna describes how her learners refuse to do ILPs any longer because they feel the time taken to do them is time taken away from group teaching.

One of the more experienced teachers, Jack, describes a constant tension between the policy demands of ESOL, as interpreted by his college, and his own insider understanding of learners and their needs; a tension evident in his comments on how the ESOL curriculum is used. He sees the over-reliance on the curriculum and the mapping process as props for those who do not know what they are doing: '*It creates a level of bureaucracy and number-crunching that appears to show that everything's going all right.*' He is especially scathing of the assessments used by his institution, which he regards as being of a particularly low standard. His critique is based on the gap between bureaucratic requirements, managerialist

discourses and practices and his professional standards and autonomy. Jack sees a distancing of management from concern with the quality of the learners' experience. He sums up the changes in ESOL with a metaphor of the ESOL tradition as feminised ('*For the last 20 years, people have been kind of knitting worksheets for students. It has that very homely service in the community, almost charity-work type feel.'*) and now transformed by the masculine philosophy of the new policy initiatives, echoing earlier concerns within the school system (Leonard, 1998). He rejects an over-reliance on either of these discourses, suggesting that what is needed is a language-teaching pedagogy grounded in knowledge of language acquisition and language-teaching theory and a respect for the academic potential of ESOL learners.

Despite these concerns, some teachers accept and value the systems at their places of work. Hema describes a seemingly ideal planning situation in a college where she shares a course with other colleagues and planning is done as a team activity within an environment which is learner- rather than management-centred. ILPs and schemes of work are effective in this team context and part of a wider college culture of effective record-keeping: '...*so there's always records there. And if they go to another class, you can pass on the same records.*' A supportive and organised college structure makes sense of the record-keeping in the context of team-planning. However, for some other teachers interviewed, it was experienced as an arbitrary layer of activity, taking time away from teaching and learning.

Marjorie, a highly experienced ESOL teacher and programme manager, talks of creating a structure that can deal with variable attendance using folders and portfolios, ie paper trails that support learning as opposed to those to do with evidencing outcomes for funders. Organised and structured, she frequently uses a metaphor of 'language delivery' and building: '*You don't want to be building on something they haven't actually had.*' Within this structure, she describes her teaching style now as 'instinctive' and could perhaps be seen as an experienced improviser. She views the ESOL curriculum as a natural vehicle within which '...*you have to build in a certain degree of flexibility.*' However, she again finds ILPs a hindrance and critiques them thus: '*Any good tutor is going to have an awareness of individual needs within their group.*' Fine-tuned needs analysis should be left to teachers' professionalism, not to external regimes of scrutiny.

6.4 Balancing and juggling competing demands

The rapidly changing environment leads to a daily need to balance and juggle competing demands: mapping teaching onto the national curriculum, entering students for national tests, fulfilling college requirements, and meeting students' demands and needs. As well as teaching language, ESOL teachers carry out many other roles, as advice workers, counsellors, social organisers, literacy brokers and interpreters. Balancing competing demands can be particularly acute for community-based teachers who, in addition to meeting curriculum and college requirements, have to negotiate and liaise with community organisations, as well as teaching in less than ideal contexts.

6.5 ESOL teachers' stance

We use the term 'stance' to refer to how teachers position themselves in relation to the policy context and institutional structures within which they work, as well as in relation to their

students, their teaching, and the ESOL profession itself. The teachers in our study position themselves in a range of ways in relation to different aspects of the policy environment. They also take up varying stances in relation to learners, teaching and learning and their sense of control in their working lives.

Life experience

Stance is affected by life experiences and formations, which vary widely amongst the EEPP teachers. Salima's life story shapes and informs the way she approaches her work and responds to students, influencing and shaping her 'theory of practice':

> *See, I look at my own experience ... I started in primary school and worked my way through. Now, I never worked before I was married because you know women so much didn't. And although I had my education and everything, it was never taken seriously. Even after marriage, I know often my husband would say "You know your experience of life." With the Asian culture, women are protected by parents first. Fathers then husbands. In a lot of cultures, it happens. And you know he was always promoting learning. Everything he did he involved me. Even if it was basic things such as taking out insurance for the house or whatever. And I'm glad he did because um he died at a very early stage of our marriage. Well not very early but er we were only together about 15/16 years. And I had to pick up the pieces. Both my children were in private school. And I didn't want to disrupt their education so I carried on with my work. I had to cope with everything. Keep the children going. And I always say to them "Well fine, you don't want a job now but you don't know what situation you're going to be in the future".*

Her whole pedagogical strategy is based on an alignment with her students; she sees herself as a role model and believes her learners can do what she has done.

Vanessa, a teacher in Hull, is a well travelled teacher with an EFL background; she uses an 'ethnographic' strategy of trying to get inside students' heads ('*I ended up imagining how people would feel when they went along the street and couldn't read.*'). She is worried about imposing her own perspective on students, but taking an ethnographic stance '...*opens up a whole new world for you.*' Other teachers have a more instrumental stance towards the learner: '*I look at the class and I think "I can teach you what you need to know."*' (Carl, a teacher in Leeds). Where Vanessa's approach is cautious and heuristic, Carl is more definite and confident in his professional ability to know better than his students. Nasim, the only teacher on a Jobcentre Plus course, got his teaching job after taking part in a Jobcentre Plus course himself, and his stance is similar to that of Salima's: one of offering a role model to students. Nasim's interview, however, betrays the uncertainty of his employment situation because his programme stands or falls on meeting its targets. Nasim's insecure position, coupled with the pressure to meet targets and retain funding, leads to an invidious categorisation of students as 'best-achievers' (ie likely to meet targets) and 'hopeless cases' (likely to lose us funding). Stance implies some form of being in control (in balance); if people lack a sense of being in control, they cannot take up a coherent or critical stance.

Disclosure

Another aspect of a teacher's stance relates to the level of self-disclosure and personal narrative that they bring into their teaching. Some, such as Carl, maintain a friendly distance from their learners, while others, such as Carol, a teacher in London, weaves in stories about herself, her childhood, her family and her personal life with those of her students, so there is very little division between them. Some are open about their lives and beliefs and, in the

same way, they encourage their students to be: Sarah talks about her political beliefs in class and is happy for her students to do so too. Michael makes a point each year of telling his class he is gay, partly because he expects them to be open with him, and partly because he believes that they may not often get the chance to meet gay people.

6.6 Professional life histories, professional learning histories

Teachers' professional life stories and learning histories contribute to the stance they take up in relation to their current professional practice and working environment. Some have come into ESOL teaching having worked overseas in relation to EFL, VSO or other kinds of international experience. They seem to relish living with language and cultural difference; their ESOL work is a continuation of the interest that took them to live and work abroad earlier in their careers. The challenge of this group is to transfer their overseas-based language teaching experience to the UK ESOL environment. A significant group came into ESOL from other kinds of work such as secretarial, alternative therapy and retail. A teacher from London, for example, originally worked in publishing as a typesetter and got interested in ESOL after becoming involved in a political campaign against the first Gulf War.

Training

An important influence is professional training and experience as a teacher. Many people with an EFL training have a strong linguistic and pedagogic background. Paul has an EFL background but also worked with homeless people and so orients to his learners' disadvantages and needs, which informs his ESOL teaching. The confidence drawn from experience and professionalism contrasts with the tentative first steps of the new and relatively inexperienced teachers, who are more reliant on the *Skills for Life* structure to scaffold their professional development. Newer teachers highly value the chance to learn from colleagues: one such teacher in Yorkshire talks of benefiting very much from informal observation, team teaching and borrowing ideas from colleagues. In some cases, training can turn around deeply held assumptions about language. One teacher's own language learning was in the Ukraine, through grammar translation, but her CELTA training *'...did convert me, yeah. I do believe it's better to do this communicative way.'* She then has to adapt her methods again for the ESOL context: *'With ESOL, it's very different. It's a lot more literacy involved and your assumptions on what they know are very different because their background is different.'*

6.7 A safe environment for learning

Each classroom creates its own environment, partly based on the stance of the teacher, the range of students, the physical and other characteristics of the setting and its wider social environment. A common theme is creating a safe environment for learning, perhaps especially for those teaching large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers. There are plenty of comments on the importance of the group 'gelling', important for any group of learners, but perhaps more so with groups of people from very diverse backgrounds who may all have suffered some level of trauma or difficulty. We find a range of contrasting perspectives on how to engage with issues brought into the classroom by students, from those who see the personal and life experiences of students as forming an essential part – perhaps the essential part of the curriculum – to those who prefer to leave student experiences and issues at the classroom door and focus on language as the organising principle of the ESOL classroom, striving to create a safe and productive space for learning.

Tutors must consider how to deal with possible conflicting opinions in their diverse classrooms: Dina strives to find materials that are interesting but not 'divisive' or 'upsetting' and Carol encourages the discussions of her students to be as convergent as possible, intervening when she perceives a potential source of disagreement.

6.8 Planning and sequencing

Approaches to planning and sequencing are strongly influenced by policy requirements. Other influences are stance and professional life history, as well as materials and theories of learning. Most teachers typically draw up a scheme of work, though here again practices differ: sometimes they do this before they meet the students (thus as a document for managers rather than teachers), some are responsible for doing this themselves and some have an in-house model produced for them. Some equate lesson planning with what worksheets are available, others with the unit they are up to in the AECC. Some plan because they feel they ought to, but make it clear that they can teach just as easily without a plan. Others only write a plan at inspection time, while some over-plan and seem unable to cope if they do not.

Martin, an experienced teacher, talks of picking up topics and running with them. He is an 'improviser', pragmatic about starting lessons on time, and is happy to be '…*fielding people when they come in*'; he is open to learners' input and makes use of their contributions. Jenny, a less experienced teacher, is a 'planner', although this is very time-consuming: '*I'm quite pedantic with the planning and I don't think it's always a good thing.*' The result is highly structured teaching, although Jenny wonders if she will be able, eventually, to become more relaxed about it.

6.9 Methodologies and materials

Teachers talk about a variety of approaches and strategies in relation to their teaching. There is, predictably, a range of stances in relation to the AECC, which is used to greater or lesser degrees and with differing levels of approval. Some teachers appreciate the full colour production and are happy to use it as reinforcement for what they are already doing or as an aid for deciding what to teach. There is also appreciation that the materials associated with the AECC are peopled by characters more like ESOL students than those found in EFL textbooks. Others, however, use the materials sparingly and are critical of the way they position the learners only as consumers of products and services. For example, Carol rarely uses the materials as she believes her real-life students are more relevant than the scenarios found in the AECC. Some institutions seem to insist on their use in planning, leaving some people teaching to the materials in a way that they are not in agreement with. There is a similar variation with respect to EFL textbooks. Teachers commonly use an eclectic *'bricolage'* approach to materials, adapting, pick-and-mixing, cutting and pasting and creating their own resources. Some use EFL textbooks to help them present grammar (seen as lacking in rigour in the AECC), while being concerned about their over-representation of people with middle-class lifestyles. The most experienced and effective teachers seem to use what might be called a 'principled eclecticism'.

6.10 Professional vision

A consistent theme in this chapter has been that of the professional expertise of ESOL teachers, ranging from the relatively inexperienced and novice, such as Nasim, who are struggling to 'get their balance' in the classroom, to highly qualified and experienced practitioners such as Jack, Hema and Marjorie. Charles Goodwin talks usefully of 'professional vision', describing how through participation:

> ...actors become competent members of the group, and also acquire the distinctive ways of seeing, the *professional vision*, the stance toward a consequential environment that both defines membership in a group, such as a profession, and differentiates it from other groups. (Goodwin, 1994)

The interviews provide rich evidence of professional vision in the talk of the teachers we interviewed. Tom, originally a secondary maths teacher, positions himself as a novice, yet much that he is doing seems on the right track. It seems that Tom has an instinct or hunch for what to do, but does not have the analytical tools for reflecting on his practice; ie he has not yet developed his professional vision.

Predictably, it is the most experienced and skilled teachers who articulate most fluently their professional vision. Marjorie draws on her professional funds of knowledge to critique ILPs and other quantitative performance indicators that she believes betray a misunderstanding of how language is learnt. Vanessa critiques SMART targets: '*Language acquisition doesn't work like that*....'. Professional vision provides the knowledge and confidence to take up a critical stance in relation to how policy is interpreted by management in colleges and other providers.

Teachers with the clearest professional vision are able, in Goodwin's terms, to code, categorise and critically highlight issues in a complex field. The development of professional vision seems to involve developing insights that go beyond 'the classroom scene' into the college system and wider context in which ESOL teaching and learning is embedded. Professional vision is characteristic of the experienced, expert practitioner. Based on funds of knowledge and judgement, derived from their professional and life histories, the experienced professional can take up a position, a reasoned stance on any particular issue in the classroom or the surrounding environment, resulting in informed action.

7 Take 40 classrooms: Teaching and learning strategies in the classrooms observed

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data concerning the teaching and learning strategies identified in our classroom observations. We present findings related to the General Teaching Strategies, the Strategies for Learner Involvement and the Specific Teaching Strategies, outlining what the descriptive statistics tell us, then presenting the correlations identified.

General Teaching Strategies
In the General Teaching Strategies (GTS) instrument, 26 items, believed on the basis of the research literature to characterise effective ESOL teaching, were assessed by the observer on a four-point scale (0–3) as a holistic post-observation assessment of the characteristics of the lesson observed (see Table 7.1). These correspond to Condelli's Instructional Strategies scale (2003).

The recording of these strategies was completed immediately after the class, and represent, in our view, some kind of judgement about effectiveness: we suggest below that the GTS can be taken together with the SLI as a research-informed measure of teaching quality in the classes we observed.

Strategies for Learner Involvement
Strategies for Learner Involvement (SLI) were assessed using ten items, completed, like the GTS, as a holistic assessment of the characteristics of the lesson immediately after the observation (see Table 7.2). Again, these were derived from the 'Student Engagement with Tasks' measure in the Condelli study, trialled, validated and adapted for the UK context.

Specific Teaching Strategies
While the four-point scale used to record the GTS and the SLI provides evaluative data on the occurrence of particular strategies in the classrooms observed, the Specific Teaching Strategies (STS) are descriptive and do not imply any evaluation of quality. In order to code the STS, the observer recorded a running record of classroom activity. The STS Instrument (see Appendix 1 of the forthcoming longer report on www.nrdc.org.uk) provided the following framework for coding classroom activity:

Communication Skills: Listening (A1–6)
(Activities designed to help the learners understand spoken English)

Communication Skills: Speaking (B1–13)
(Activities designed to help learners develop English-speaking skills and interactional strategies)

Understanding how English works (C1–9)

(Activities designed to teach learners patterns of English syntax and morphology, sentences and utterances)

Vocabulary (D1–10)
(Activities designed to teach learners new English words)

Cultural and background knowledge (E1–8)
(Activities designed to help learners develop background knowledge of the UK and/or share their own world/cultural and linguistic knowledge)

Reading (F1–17)
(Activities that help learners develop their reading skills)

Writing (G1–9)
(Activities that help learners develop their writing skills)

Learning with ICT (H1–2)
(Activities that help learners develop their language and ICT skills)

If, for example, we recorded a lesson phase in which students were listening to classroom instructions as A2 - 'Listening to classroom instructions', we were not initially judging effectiveness, simply recording what was observed. If an overwhelming proportion of a given lesson is devoted to listening to teacher instructions, this may not be characteristic of effective ESOL teaching. As it turns out, there is a statistically significant correlation between balance and variety and learner progress as measured by the test (see below), which suggests that a very high incidence of any specific teaching strategy might not in itself be an indicator of effective practice.

7.2 General Teaching Strategies

Table 7.1 presents the mean ratings for each of the 26 General Teaching Strategies, averaged across all three visits to all 40 classes. Strategy 18 was the one least used/observed, while Strategy 23 was the most used/observed. This finding resonates with that of Condelli et al, who note that encouraging opportunities for choices and critical thinking was the least observed instructional strategy in their data (Condelli et al, 2003, p 78). The top five strategies suggest overall classes that, in addition to creating a supportive environment, emphasise direct teaching, opportunities to focus on accuracy, the use of visual means to support learning and modelling and repeating. In contrast, the five least observed strategies overall suggest classrooms that, while being low on critical evaluation and reflection, are less likely to 'bring the outside in', support the use of students' first or expert language (L1) as an aid to learning, use material from authentic sources or support independent learning.

Table 7.1 **Descriptive statistics on the use of the General Teaching Strategies across classes**

Strategy number	The tutor	Mean
GS23	Created a safe, supportive environment for learning eg through praise and encouragement, humour, equal opportunities	**2.8354**
GS03	Engaged in direct teaching (eg when a point was unclear, a pattern or point needed to be highlighted)	2.6896
GS12	Provided opportunities for focus on accuracy	2.6771
GS04	Used gesture, eye contact, visual aids and so on to help learners understand	2.5896
GS05	Supported learning through modelling and repeating	2.5771
GS26	Linked lesson to previous or forthcoming lessons	2.5417
GS08	Provided a range of activities that kept learners involved and engaged	2.5396
GS22	Provided feedback in class to learners on their work and understanding of what was taught	2.4854
GS13	Integrated reading, writing, speaking, listening	2.4771
GS14	Created an overall balance and cohesion in the lesson between different stages and activities	2.4646
GS07	Generated and exploited illustrative contextualised examples	2.4354
GS06	Supported learning through rephrasing	2.4292
GS02	Was flexible and responded to learners' concerns as they arose, went with the 'teachable moment'	2.4062
GS01	Shared the overall goal for the lesson as well as individual activities; brought the lesson back to the overall point or theme	2.3792
GS09	Provided a variety of materials	2.3562
GS21	Provided opportunities to work together, do projects, jointly solve problems, read and write collaboratively	2.3229
GS11	Provided opportunities for fluency practice	2.2750
GS16	Offered opportunities for extended learner output (eg by asking open-ended and exploratory questions, encouraging learner input on classroom topics)	2.1021
GS25	Offered end-of-class summaries or highlights of teaching points from the lesson	2.0646
GS17	Supported authentic, spontaneous communication about outside topics	1.9500
GS19	Linked what was learned to life outside the classroom	1.8708
GS24	Encouraged independent learning	1.7167
GS10	Provided materials from authentic sources	1.4250
GS15	Supported use of learners' L1 as a strategy for making meaning and understanding tasks	1.2542
GS20	Brought 'outside' into the classroom, eg field trips, guest speakers, realia	1.1625
GS18	Encouraged learners to evaluate/be critical and reflect upon their learning, experiences and knowledge	**1.1521**

The reliability co-efficient (Cronbach's alpha, see Glossary) for the 26 items of General Teaching Strategies is very good: . = 0.93. This supports the idea that the items could be taken together as a unitary measure of teaching quality, enabling us to look for correlations between the General Teaching Strategies and learner progress.

Correlation of General Teaching Strategies with learner progress
Correlation of the General Teaching Strategies as a whole with learners' progress was not statistically significant.

7.3 Strategies for Learner Involvement

Descriptive statistics

Table 7.2 presents mean ratings for each of the ten learner involvement categories averaged across observations of all 40 classes. Strategy 10 was the one least used/observed, confirming the relative absence of a focus on critical reflection in the classes we observed. Strategy 7 was the most used/observed. Examination of the five most and least used strategies here seems to confirm the trend we identified in the most and least used General Teaching Strategies: that the classes we observed were relatively high on features of pedagogical organisation and relatively low on critical evaluation and reflection of both the content and process of learning, on making choices about how to learn and on 'bringing the outside in'. The level of student agency was relatively high within the classroom frame, less so in relation to determining the shape of classroom activity and its relationship with life outside.

Table 7.2 **Descriptive statistics for items in the Strategies for Learner Involvement**

Strategy number	To what extent did learners	Mean
LI07	Spend sufficient time on a task and sustain concentration and focus while carrying it out?	**2.77**
LI02	Learn with and from each other either using English and/or their L1?	2.48
LI04	Elaborate and extend output beyond single utterances?	2.27
LI01	Contribute ideas based on their experience and knowledge?	2.22
LI03	Initiate exchanges during the lesson, either by asking questions, making statements or introducing topic shifts?	2.08
LI06	Talk with each other and/or the teacher about carrying out a task?	1.76
LI08	Make the connection between classroom-type tasks and the challenges they face outside the classroom?	1.49
LI05	Make choices regarding content and the ways they want to learn?	1.01
LI09	Provide comment on their own learning processes?	0.86
LI10	Offer evaluative or critical responses to text and topics?	**0.73**

A reliability analysis was carried out (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88), indicating high inter-item reliability, supporting the idea that the items could be taken together as a unitary measure of teaching quality.

Correlation between Strategies for Learner Involvement and student progress

No significant correlations could be established between the learner involvement items and student progress class-by-class. We therefore decided to examine, as Condelli et al did, the possibility of grouping or clustering these strategies, to see if particular combinations of them would correlate with learner progress.

7.4 Combining General Teaching Strategies and Strategies for Learner Involvement scales

The relationship between the GTS and SLI scales was examined next. This was found to be positive and quite strong (Pearson's r = 0.80).

Because of the strong correlation between the two variables, demonstrated by their grouping along a single line in Figure 7.1, it was decided to combine the two sets of items in one scale. The internal consistency of the new scale was very high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.95), again suggesting one underlying factor of 'teaching quality'.

Figure 7.1 **Scatterplot of General Teaching Strategies and Strategies for Learner Involvement total scores**
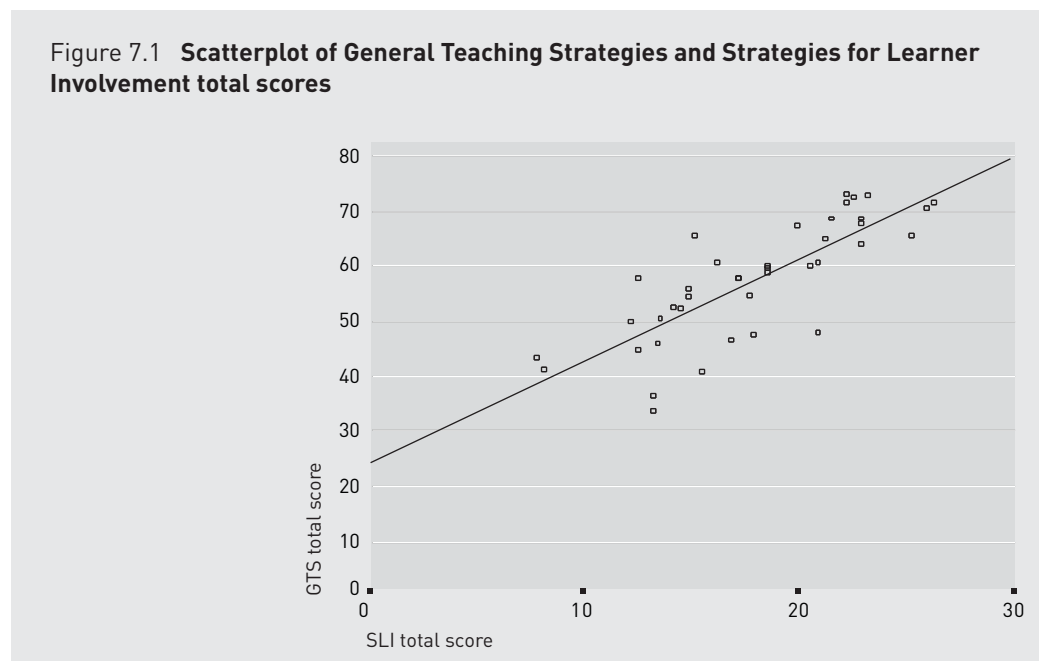
However, unlike the Condelli study, there were not enough cases to carry out a factor analysis. General Teaching Strategies and Strategies for Learner Involvement were grouped together by the research team in order to examine further any possible relations with assessment scores.

Descriptive statistics on the groupings of General Teaching Strategies (GTS) and Strategies for Learner Involvement (SLI)

Items were grouped in four sub-scales as detailed in Table 7.3:

Table 7.3 **Groupings of GTS and SLI items in thematic sub-scales**

A Balance and variety (mean average across all observations: 2.47)

Teachers will typically:

- Provide a range of activities that keep learners involved and engaged
- Provide a variety of materials
- Provide opportunities for fluency practice
- Provide opportunities for focus on accuracy
- Integrate reading, writing, speaking, listening
- Create an overall balance and cohesion in the lesson
- Link lesson to previous or forthcoming lessons

B Planning and explicitness (mean: 2.53)

Teachers will typically:

- Share the overall goal for the lesson as well as individual activities
- Bring the lesson back to the overall point or theme
- Engage in direct teaching

- Use gesture, eye contact, visual aids and so on to help learners understand
- Support learning through modelling and repeating
- Support learning through rephrasing
- Generate and exploit illustrative contextualised examples
- Provide feedback in class to learners on their work and understanding of what is taught
- Create a safe, supportive environment for learning
- Offer end-of-class summaries or highlights of teaching points from the lesson

Learners will typically:

- Spend sufficient time on a task and sustain concentration and focus while carrying it out

C Creating a collaborative learning environment (mean: 1.70)

Teachers will typically:

- Be flexible and respond to learners' concerns as they arise, will go with the 'teachable moment'
- Support use of learners' L1 as a strategy for making meaning and understanding tasks
- Offer opportunities for extended learner output
- Encourage learners to evaluate/be critical and reflect upon their learning, experiences and knowledge
- Provide opportunities to work together, do projects, jointly solve problems, read and write collaboratively
- Encourage independent learning

Learners will typically:

- Learn with and from each other, either using English and/or their L1
- Initiate exchanges during the lesson, by asking questions, making statements or introducing topic shifts
- Elaborate and extend output beyond single utterances
- Make choices regarding content and ways they want to learn
- Talk with each other and/or the teacher about carrying out a task
- Provide comment on their own learning processes
- Offer evaluative or critical responses to texts and topics

D Connecting classroom with learners' outside lives (mean: 1.68)

Teachers will typically:

- Provide materials from authentic sources
- Support authentic, spontaneous communication about outside topics
- Link what is learned to life outside the classroom
- Bring 'outside' into the classroom, eg field trips, guest speakers, 'realia' (see Glossary)

Learners will typically:

- Contribute ideas based on their experience and knowledge
- Make the connection between classroom-based tasks and the challenges they face outside the classroom

All four sub-scales had high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.84 to 0.91 for all of them. **Balance and variety** and **planning and explicitness** strategies were observed more than the other two scales. This is indicated in the means presented in Table 7.3. A repeated measures ANOVA with Greenhouse-Geisser correction showed that this difference was highly significant, $F_{(1.69, 66.02)} = 83.64$, $p < 0.001$.

Our finding is, therefore, that in the classes we observed there is a highly significant difference between the amount of **balance and variety** and **planning and explicitness** strategies and the amount of **creating a collaborative learning environment** and **connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives** strategies. This suggests that classes that were predominantly teacher-focused, with learner-learner interaction less emphasised. Classes were well planned and organised, demonstrating many core qualities of good language-teaching practice, yet with less emphasis on relating what went on in the classroom to the outside world. Just as, in Chapter 6, we described teachers balancing different aspects of their professional lives, here we see them balancing different aspects of ESOL pedagogy in their planning and delivery of lessons.

Correlations with assessment scores

Table 7.4 presents the correlations between scores in the four sub-scales and assessment scores.

Table 7.4 **Correlation coefficients (Pearson's *r*) between assessment scores and GTS/SLI groupings**

		Correlation with Balance and variety	Correlation with Planning and explicitness	Correlation with Creating a collaborative learning environment	Correlation with Connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives
Pre-assess scores (class level)	Grammar and vocabulary	-0.28	-0.19	0.01	0.13
	Pronunciation	-0.10	-0.08	0.12	0.25
	Interactive communication	-0.24	-0.19	0.03	0.22
	Global	-0.22	-0.18	0.04	0.30
	Total	-0.23	-0.17	0.06	0.25
Post-assess scores (class level)	Grammar and vocabulary	0.22	0.06	0.11	0.25
	Pronunciation	0.15	-0.02	0.01	0.08
	Interactive communication	0.20	0.04	0.04	0.14
	Global	0.03	-0.08	0.03	0.22
	Total	0.14	-0.01	0.05	0.17
Pre-post difference (class level)	Grammar and vocabulary	0.52*	0.27	0.14	0.15
	Pronunciation	0.31	0.07	-0.15	-0.22
	Interactive communication	0.48*	0.26	0.04	-0.03
	Global	0.26	0.09	0.02	-0.02
	Total	0.44*	0.20	0.006	-0.06

(* Correlation significant at p $\leftarrow$ 0.01)

Our finding is, therefore, that there were moderate and significant correlations between the use of **balance and variety** strategies and gain in grammar and vocabulary scores, interactive communication scores and total assessment scores. The more these strategies were used, the more likely the learners to have made gains at post-assessment in grammar and vocabulary, interactive communication and total scores. This finding suggests a correlation between core characteristics of **balance and variety** in lesson planning and delivery and student progress. This contrasts with the Condelli study, in which strategies for 'bringing the outside in' correlated strongly with student progress.

7.5 Specific Teaching Strategies

As noted above, the groupings of Specific Teaching Strategies we arrived at are as follows:

Communication skills – listening (A1–6)
Communication skills – speaking (B1–13)
Understanding how English works (C1–9)
Vocabulary (D1–10)
Cultural and background knowledge (E1–8)
Reading (F1–17)
Writing (G1–9)
Learning with ICT (H1–2)

Figure 7.2 shows the mean proportions of class time for each of the six groups of specific strategies.

Figure 7.2 **Proportion of time spent on groups of specific strategies**

■ Specific strategies group

Group	
A1-A6	
B1-B13	
C1-C9	
D1-D10	
E1-E8	
F1-F17	
G1-G9	
H1-H2	

% 0 20 40 60 80 100
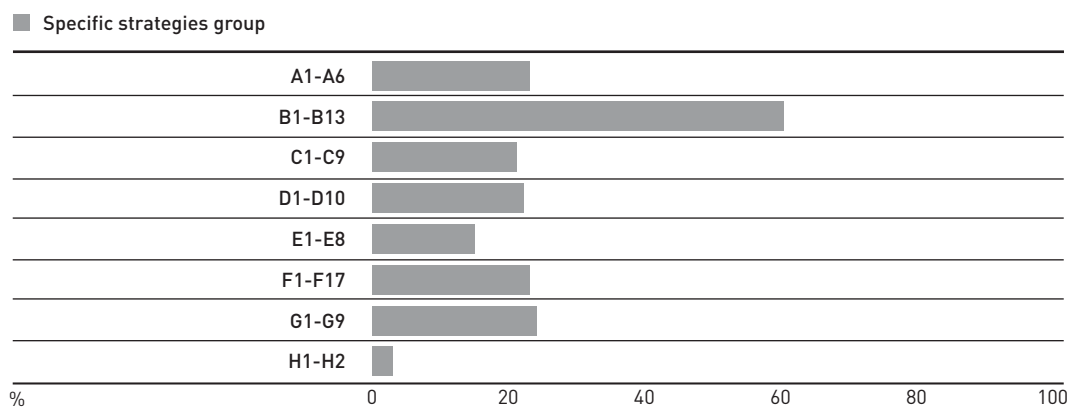
The major emphasis was on speaking, with roughly equal amounts of time spent on listening, explicit focus on language, teaching vocabulary and on literacy (reading and writing). Teaching of cultural background knowledge was less evidenced and learning with ICT minimal.

Descriptive statistics: Mean frequencies of each Specific Teaching Strategy
The occurrences of each of the specific strategies recorded during the observations were averaged over all visits to all the classes, providing an overview of most and least frequently used individual strategies. Tables 7.5 and 7.6 present the 15 most and least used strategies.

Table 7.5 **Most frequently used strategies in observed classrooms**

Most frequently used Specific Teaching Strategies	Mean
B3: Responding to teacher's questions and elicitation	.1921
C5: Completing exercises to practise grammatical structure	.0832
A1: Active listening to tapes, videos, the teacher, each other	.0762
B12: Activities which highlight accurate output	.0738
B1: Practising planned communicative exchanges	.0729
A2: Listening to classroom instructions	.0724
B4: Spontaneous exchange of information/conversation	.0690
F3: Reading classroom texts	.0618
D6: Completing exercises to learn/practise new words	.0540
A3: Carrying out tasks related to listening	.0517
B2: Practising less structured communicative exchanges, but where topic or focus is decided by teacher	.0483
G1: Exercises which focus on grammatical accuracy	.0474
G7: Focus on spelling	.0469
D2: Learning pre-selected vocabulary needed for a classroom activity	.0417
F2: Carrying out activities to check understanding of texts	.0401

The majority of these strategies, apart from B4, and perhaps to a lesser extent B2, indicate teacher-led activity. B3 is the most common. It involves students responding to teacher's questions and elicitation, the classic Initiation Response Feedback structure of teacher-centred classroom discourse. Strategies B3, C5 and A1 were the three most frequently observed ones (occupying an average of 36 per cent of class time). These descriptive statistics support the finding from our grouping of the General Teaching Strategies and Learner Involvement Strategies: that the classes we investigated were stronger on aspects of planning and organisation and on teacher-centred activity, than on activity making student contributions central and on 'bringing the outside in'.

Table 7.6 **Least frequently used strategies in observed classrooms**

Least frequently used Specific Teaching Strategies	Mean
F9: Focus on unknown words in texts (learner led)	.0024
D10: Use of translation for understanding meaning and recording new vocabulary	.0022
D8: Learning new words that are related	.0022
F17: Using text as a vehicle for further discussion	.0019
C4: Comparing a feature of English with the same feature in learners' home language	.0019
F6: Learning the metalanguage of reading	.0015
D7: Carrying out activities to help learners work out the meaning of words from context	.0010
F8: Activities to help learners use knowledge of grammar, word order, parts of speech and word formation to predict meaning and decipher unknown words	.0009
F14: Reading for personal pleasure	.0006
F12: Dictionary work/translation/reference tools	.0006
D5: Learning the metalanguage for vocabulary learning	.0003
F5: Focus on the role of punctuation in reading	.0003
F7: Discussing different purposes of texts	.0002
F16: Critical reading	.0001
A6: Listening in order to judge formality and informality in spoken interactions	.0000

Strategies involving drawing on students' L1 (D10, C4, F12) are in this least-used group, as

were activities that either developed or drew on students' metalinguistic knowledge (F6, F8, D5). There is little emphasis on register and text-level factors (F7, A6) and on activities that might encourage learner participation and extended talk (F9, F17, D7). The virtual absence of a focus on critical reading (F16) can perhaps be linked to the lack of focus on critical reflection identified in the least observed GTS and SLI, both related to critical evaluation and response to texts or topics.

Grouping the Specific Teaching Strategies
Since the number of Specific Teaching Strategies was too large for correlational purposes, specific strategies were also grouped in the following way, according to what aspect of ESOL learning they were focusing on:

Group 1 (grammar): C1, C2, C3, C5, C7, C8, C9, G1 and F8
Group 2 (vocabulary): B6, D1–D10, F9, F10, F12
Group 3 (pronunciation): A5, B7, B8, B9
Group 4 (interaction): A4, A6, B1–B4, B10, B11 and B13

These groupings also corresponded with the sub-components of the test, permitting correlations with these and with the test scores as a whole to be investigated.

Descriptive statistics
Descriptive statistics for the proportion of class time spent on each of these groups of categories appear in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7 **Descriptive statistics for four groups of Specific Teaching Strategies**

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
GROUP 1	.00	.07	.025	.020
GROUP 2	.00	.06	.017	.013
GROUP 3	.00	.10	.013	.019
GROUP 4	.02	.14	.053	.023

Correlations
Each of the above groups of specific strategies was then correlated with progress in the corresponding sub-component of the assessment. All of the correlations were quite low and were statistically non-significant.

However, the relationship between Group 1 strategies and difference in grammar and vocabulary scores appeared curvilinear and an eta (h) correlation was computed, which was found to be moderately high, h=0.53. Figure 7.3 demonstrates this in scatterplot form.

Figure 7.3 **Specific strategies: Correlations with progress**
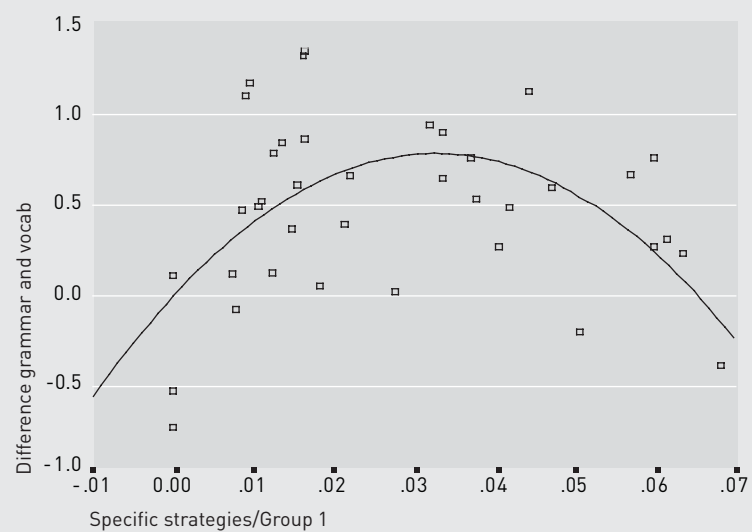
The relationship between Group 1 strategies and progress in grammar and vocabulary indicates that classes where these strategies were observed to a very high or very low degree tended to make less progress in grammar and vocabulary, than classes which used these strategies to some extent.

This interesting and complex finding deserves some discussion. It should be remembered that the Specific Teaching Strategies are descriptive rather than evaluative, simply describing what was observed rather than evaluating whether they were done effectively or badly. It may therefore be that at both ends of a spectrum, under- and over-reliance on strategies for explicitly teaching grammar and vocabulary are less effective than classrooms which rely moderately on these strategies, perhaps in the context of a wider diversity of other strategies, and are thus in the middle range of the continuum. This would connect with the correlational finding relating **balance and variety** to learner progress: either over- or under-doing the teaching of grammar and vocabulary is less effective than a more balanced and varied approach.

7.6 Discussion

The descriptive statistics examined provide a way of characterising the classrooms and the activities we observed. Insights from grouping the GTS and SLI showed that, in the 40 classrooms we observed, strategies related to **balance and variety** and **planning and explicitness** were significantly more in evidence than those which promoted **collaborative learning** and **connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives**. There was a strong correlation between the strategies that encouraged **balance and variety** and achievement in relation to progress in the grammar and vocabulary, interaction and global scorings in the test, though not in pronunciation. Of course, this does not mean that strategies for creating a collaborative learning environment and relating inside to outside are not relevant to effective classroom practice. What this does suggest, however, is that they may be necessary but not sufficient. It may be that the **balance and variety** strategies represent a kind of core of pedagogical activity that can transform everyday activities such as chatting and sharing
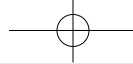
experiences into activities that will support and promote language learning.

The descriptive findings from the STS data suggests a clear profile of typically occurring classroom activities that contrasts with those that occurred infrequently or never. This suggests classrooms strong on promoting the core macro skill of speaking, with less time spent on these areas: listening, teaching of grammar and vocabulary and literacy, making use of learners' L1, exploiting or developing their metalinguistic knowledge, encouraging critical reflection and engagement with texts and activities leading to more open-ended reflective talk.

While there are no strong correlations between major emphases in the selected groupings and student progress, there is an interesting and challenging finding that suggests that a moderate focus on grammar and vocabulary enables students to out-perform those in classes where the amount of focus on grammar and vocabulary is higher or lower. This may simply mean what teachers will know already: that it is possible both to over- and under-do teaching, and that achievement and progress results from a balance between these and other pedagogical strategies. We suggested, in our analysis of teacher interviews in Chapter 6, that balance is a key construct in characterising the expertise and working life of ESOL teachers. Here is another case where explicit focus on grammar and vocabulary is balanced by other teaching and learning strategies. How this is realised in classrooms will be the subject of Chapter 8.
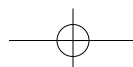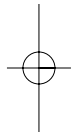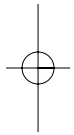
8 Telling cases: Ten classroom case studies

I don't know how they [the teachers] made me hear what they said in class... they built me, I was just like a stone. They knocked my head and they made me hear. At the beginning I was hearing nothing, just sitting there then leaving. (Eritrean woman, Leeds)

8.1 Introduction: The ten case studies

This chapter illustrates dimensions of effective practice, based on ten case studies of classes that scored above the mean scores across all GTS and SLI. It sheds light both on how expert teachers used these strategies and what other stances, or qualities, contribute to their effectiveness. We have undertaken a systematic qualitative analysis of all 40 classes, looking at them in as holistic a way as time and the large data set allowed. The preliminary analysis of each set of classroom data consisted of statistical findings, interpretive field notes and 'telling' extracts from teacher and learner interviews. These analyses were then used in the selection of the ten case studies. A close interpretative reading of these case studies has produced the overarching themes described in this chapter.

Criteria for selection of these ten were based on our criteria for effective practice (see Section 2.5): progress in the class as a whole, according to the EEPP assessment; high mean scores on General Teaching Strategies (GTS) and Strategies for Learner Involvement (SLI) instruments (see Chapter 7) and qualitative data from interviews and interpretive field notes. We selected cases from each level on the project – E1, E2 and E3. The aim was to illuminate effective practice in as far as statistical results, observed activities and teacher stance together were suggestive of good teaching and learner experience. There were a number of other classes which would have also made good cases, should time and space have permitted. There were also classes that scored below the mean on most strategies and where the professional vision seen in the case study classrooms was absent.

We then began a process of 'drilling down' into the audio-recorded detail of classroom talk. Statistical findings were related to the field notes in order to locate instances of a particular strategy; other aspects of the lessons that did not relate to coded observations were noted, for example use of materials and teacher response to a particular classroom environment. Other features of teachers' practice that spanned whole episodes or the entire lesson were evidenced from the field notes and listening to audio recordings of the whole lesson. These more general descriptions were combined with the selection, transcription and analysis of short extracts that shed light on both coded observations and other aspects of teacher practice.

The table below gives the mean scores of the ten classes, to one decimal place, gained by each class in the four groupings of combined General Teaching Strategies and Strategies for Learner Involvement (GTS and SLI), detailed in Table 7.3 in the previous chapter. To recapitulate, the mean scores for the four groups across the project were:

A: Balance and variety (mean average across all observations: 2.47)
B: Planning and explicitness (mean: 2.53)
C: Creating a collaborative learning environment (mean: 1.70)
D: Connecting classroom with learners' outside lives (mean: 1.68)

Table 8.1 **The ten case study classes**

Centre	Teacher	A	B	C	D
Borderlands Centre	Zeta	2.8	2.7	2.0	2.6
Campbell Centre	Salima	2.9	2.8	2.2	2.9
Buxton Street Centre	Marjorie	2.9	2.9	2.3	2.2
East Park Muslim Community Centre	Catrin	2.9	2.9	1.5	1.8
Henry Road Centre	Dina	2.7	2.7	2.1	2.4
Panjabi Centre	Carl	2.9	3.0	2.4	2.0
Prestbury Lane Centre	Alex	3.0	2.7	2.0	3.0
Tenshill Centre	Rachel	3.0	2.9	2.0	2.1
Chatton Centre	Paul	3.0	3.0	2.1	2.0
Woodland Way Community Centre	Carol	2.5	2.8	2.5	2.0

The case studies appear in the longer version of this report (to be available on
www.nrdc.org.uk).

The higher-than-average mean scores across the four sub-categories tell part of the effective
practice tale. These scores are supported and made possible by other qualities embodied in
the case study teachers. The themes described below combine examples of both strategies
and qualities. Teachers have to balance conflicting demands and manage different classroom
ecologies and this depends upon their overall stance and how it is attuned to the particular
group. One of their main tasks is to encourage classroom talk, transforming talk into learning
and learning into talk. This is the result both of long-term planning and the 'online' planning
that occur when teachers act responsively and contingently as each moment unfolds in the
classroom. This responsiveness is also evident in the teachers as *bricoleurs* (see Glossary),
hunting out and adapting new materials and making what they can out of what is to hand in
classrooms saturated with talk. The dimensions of effective practice illustrated here are
indicative of the 'professional vision' of the teachers as they see/interpret the ESOL learning
environment in distinctive ways.

8.2 Balancing conflicting demands

One of the frequently observed qualities of effective practice was teachers' ability to juggle
internal and external demands with their own professional decisions on teaching and learning
(see Chapters 6 and 7). This also links to their high scores in the sub-scale **balance and
variety** strategies that correlate with learner progress.

Internal pressures stem from the often vulnerable situations of learners and the fragmentation
produced by fluctuating attendance, late arrivals, interruptions, intrusions and urgent
problems that must be dealt with as part of the class. Learners often have to be elsewhere, so,
although attendance is high overall, teachers create continuity with an often incomplete class,
smoothly integrating latecomers and interruptions into the flow of the lesson (see Section 8.6).

Teachers may also have to manage difficult learning environments, such as classes having no 'home' classroom, children in the class because the crèche is full and 'open-plan' classrooms shared with another class. Also, the extraordinary heterogeneity of ESOL classes means that teachers are juggling with the task of class cohesion and group/individual differences (see Sections 8.3–8.5). Effective practice requires balancing these conflicting demands and maintaining pedagogic and emotional coherence in the class. This requires good 'people skills' from teachers and not just good teaching strategies. For example, in Paul's college, punctuality and attendance are given prime importance. Concerned about falling attendance, Paul uses humour to deal with this serious institutional issue. He asks students to lay bets on how many will come for the lesson, highlighting the importance of attendance with a light touch.

Effective practice means balancing the communicative needs and interests of adult learners with their more long-term progress in language form. Expert teachers also balance accuracy, fluency and complexity, often even within a few learner/teacher utterances. They also balance the learners 'as' the syllabus with a language syllabus. This balancing act chimes with the 'eclectic post-method era' of second language teaching more generally (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). There is no easy equilibrium among these dichotomies. Each teacher finds their own balance, from Rachel's tight pedagogic ship with considerable explicit focus on form, to Carol's class where the learners are the syllabus. This balance leads to the kind of involvement and participation that provide opportunities for extended output in structured contexts, which is characteristic of ESOL effectiveness. As one learner comments: *'It seems like everything is sort of together in one class.'* (Iranian woman, London, talking about how the lessons seem to flow).

As we saw in Section 6.4, ESOL professionals are also juggling roles as teachers, advice workers, counsellors, therapists and cultural brokers. These multiple roles are part of the everyday texture of classroom life (see Section 8.3 below): advice, therapy and language learning often go together.

8.3 Classroom ecology

Talk is work in the ESOL classroom, but talk is also the means of creating social solidarity: *'The whole class activities are to keep the atmosphere going as much as anything.'*

Each classroom, and indeed each session, creates its own environment and the relationships to that environment – the classroom ecology. Sometimes, lessons are characterised by flexibility, contingency and responsiveness in the moment-by-moment unfolding of the lesson. Teachers *'...let the learners run with it, take it to another area.'* At other times, lessons go to plan with few digressions. Both types lead to high levels of learner engagement. Teachers integrate any learner-initiated topics into group learning and give highly planned lessons an elasticity to respond to unexpected moments. Despite the focus on individual learning from *Skills for Life*, the overriding orientation is towards the group (see Chapter 4).

The potentially fragile classroom ecology resulting from large numbers of vulnerable learners and diverse needs is supported and strengthened in two often contrasting ways: (i) focusing on learners' needs and problems as a way of promoting solidarity and helping learners to learn from each other, or (ii) sealing off the harsh and uncertain reality outside the classroom to provide a predictable and structured environment, for example with a course textbook creating a 'safety zone' (see Hodge, 2004). One Iranian woman saw the class as an 'escape': '...*as a way of escaping the house and of escaping sadness*'. Both of these approaches, in different ways, 'Create

a safe and supportive environment' (the General Teaching Strategy which receives the highest score – GTS 23), without being overprotective or patronising, or avoiding serious political topics.

The case study classrooms also orient to adults and their interests (see Section 8.7). From a Vygostkian perspective, this means stretching students beyond their current competence levels and concerns and involving them in topics that are intellectually challenging (Cooke and Wallace, 2004). Topics and activities cover current socio-political issues, aesthetic judgements and cultural comparisons. The case study teachers also involve their learners in critical reflection of learning and texts. This is the least observed strategy overall (see Chapter 7), but is rated more highly among the case study teachers. This suggests that less effective practice does not engage the learners adequately as adult, reflective learners with a range of interests.

8.4 Learners' voices and classroom talk

Talk is both the topic and the resource in the ESOL classroom, and it is an important means through which differentiation is accomplished, which we discuss later (see Sections 8.6 and 8.11). 'Speaking English' is the goal, but the adults in the classroom are also social actors struggling to get things done and move on in terms of their social world and work opportunities. So, classroom talk is not only about fluent and accurate linguistic form (second language acquisition, SLA) but second language socialisation (SLS): the social and pragmatic knowledge to use language in real communication and the process of socialisation through language. Examples of this include: teachers' use of humour and irony in reacting to learners' contributions, the large amount of incidental cultural knowledge woven into teachers' personal narratives and how issues of 'face' and embarrassment are handled.

In Extract 1, the teacher, Dina (T), is working with the learners on a learner-generated published text. She asks the class to predict what they think the text will say (generating schema):

Extract 1

1. T: Actually, one of my friends, her husband is Moroccan and she told me for example, in Morocco one of the differences is that children don't have a bedtime (pause)

2. S: What happened?

3. T: They don't have a special bedtime. When they get tired

4. S: They go to bed

5. T: They go to bed

6. S: It depends on

7. T: They decide themselves. Maybe it's just that family, I don't know.

8. S: Most of them, I mean

9. L: If the child get up early?

10. T: (pause) All children get up early but most children get up early

11. S: Energy

12. L: But if they're

13. T: They get up very early, five or six in the morning

14. L: They should sleep early. It's better for them

15. T: Mm but the bedtime is very different, bedtime in England you have a story maybe, it takes a long time

16. L: I think that the difference is, the child go to bed late he sleep in the afternoon, after lunch.

17. T: Right.

18. L: That's right

19. T: So maybe family life in Morocco the children

20. L: Nap. In the afternoon

21. T: Nap. Yeah, that's a good word isn't it. [addressing rest of class] Nap, what does that mean, to have a nap?

22. S: (pause) A little sleep

23. T: A little sleep. Actually they do that in many countries don't they?

24. S: Yeah in hot countries

25. T: [addressing student who needs clarification] Siesta, the siesta, nap is like a short sleep usually after lunch or dinner. So if it's very hot they have a nap in the afternoon, so maybe the timetable is different.

The students have been giving general answers (religion, culture) so the teacher introduces a more focused example in the form of an anecdote about her friend who is married to a Moroccan. This generates interest ('what happened?' Line 3) and then a series of turns in which one learner, L, explores the reasons why this might be and gives her opinion on childcare: 'it's better for them' (Line 14). In Line 15, the teacher is a cultural broker, invoking a familiar discourse that has much currency in current debates ('in England you have a story maybe'). In Line 20, L interrupts the teacher (who yields her the turn) and brings in the word 'nap'. The teacher takes up the word (see GTS 2 'Going with the teachable moment') and explains it to the others (see GTS 3 'Direct teaching'). Not only does Dina introduce some cultural knowledge about bedtime stories, but by giving an explicit example she indirectly indicates to them how to do the task – talk about specific contrasts between different cultural practices.

The teachers in the case studies encourage and support talking by (i) extending learner output

and (ii) giving sufficient time for the task; both strategies scored highly. In Zeta's class, four different opportunities for extended output are given: those provided by pedagogical activities, for example, where learners describe the souvenirs they will bring back from their country for Zeta; commentary talk – often humorous – accompanying an activity, as when a group of learners from Somalia explain with lots of laughter how a toothbrush will not come from a chemist but will be cut from a tree; 'teachable moments' arising out of a current activity when teachers encourage learners to try out and extend a new point; and interruptive moments, for example, when a learner has to explain why they cannot take part in the exam the next day.

Giving sufficient time on task is also a means of implicitly extending learner output. In Catrin's class, learners are able to spend time planning in small groups. They use 'online planning' to tell a scary story. They then re-work it to the whole group. This re-telling of the story encourages more 'strategic planning' to allow for more of a focus on accurate grammar processing as well as allowing for more complexity and fluency. (This approach is supported by the research literature; see Foster and Skehan, 1999.) It also provides opportunities for the pragmatic/performance aspects of talking to a wider audience.

As well as teachers 'scaffolding' learners' turns, learners are encouraged to notice their errors through corrections and 'recasts'. The effectiveness of this noticing of form, when meaning is the focus of attention, is also supported by the second language research literature. In addition, from a social perspective, 'repair' of socially and pragmatically uncomfortable moments feeds into the second language socialisation process (see Seedhouse, 1999).

Learners' limited opportunities to speak English outside the classroom mean that the learning environment must encourage extended output. While role play and other structured contexts can provide these opportunities, they were often observed as less effective than supporting learners' 'speaking from within'. These are the times when learners have a (sometimes urgent) need to communicate: to deal with outrage, frustrations or sadness; to explain or ask for advice about unfamiliar or upsetting issues; or to argue their case in a personal matter or over more abstract and analytical points. They have to assemble whatever resources they have to convey intent and are pushed to extend their communicative ability in ways beyond the requirements of the more tightly controlled and less personally engaging elements of the lesson.

8.5 Planning, sequencing and continuity

Two types of planning widely used to model speech production in second language learning (van Lier, 2001; Yuan and Ellis, 2003), 'strategic planning' and 'online planning', can also be applied usefully to teachers. Although teachers are institutionally required and professionally motivated to plan individual lessons and schemes of work (strategic planning), the ability to respond to the new and unexpected in the classroom in coherent and immediately useful ways (online planning), or principled improvisation (see Chapter 6), is equally important. The sub-scale **planning and explicitness** was the most observed set of strategies and these are primarily concerned with online planning. The case study teachers scored highly in these, indicating the importance of online planning where teachers have to be confident in their understanding of language and language pedagogy to be able to respond relevantly and systematically, including differentiating between somewhat different levels of oral language ability.

Much of the strategic planning in effective ESOL practice mirrors current thinking on connectionist accounts of second language learning (Ellis, 2002). Rather than the 'building

blocks' or 'jigsaw puzzle' approach to language learning, in which one block or piece is placed after the other, language development is the result of gradually building up an elaborate network of connections. This is achieved through the 'constant restructuring' of language. So repetition and recycling over a considerable period is built into teachers' strategic planning. Cutting up learning into short, bite-size modules, as required on some courses, shows no understanding of these second language learning processes. This indicates that both teachers and curriculum managers need to be aware of second language learning pedagogy when planning courses.

Planning is also evident in careful sequencing and continuity across lessons, and in explicit links between lessons presented to learners both orally and in materials. Goals are also revisited at the end of lessons. Given the inevitable fluctuation in attendance, these explicit recapitulations and links, forward and back, are essential to maintaining a cohesive learning environment (as well as meeting institutional requirements). They also act as motivators and appetisers, encouraging students to feel that they will be missing something if they do not attend. Within each lesson, each activity is strongly framed, with explicit goal-setting and staging of activities.

For example, Rachel frames a task as follows:

> We are going to do some listening about a friend of mine. This is my friend Linda. We are going to listen to a conversation between me and Linda. You are going to listen to this and write down some information. (She distributes the worksheet).

These linkages and framings require a sensitivity to learners' levels of understanding and an ability to prevent misunderstandings by raising expectability and making the instructions transparent. Teachers use metalanguage (talk about talk) to refer to and teach aspects of grammar and discourse, both deductively and inductively, through elaboration and illustration.

8.6 Materials, activities and contextualisation: 509 students in search of a subject

Language, even the most form-focused drill, cannot be learnt without a context. The problem of 'What contexts?' is solved in the case study classes in a number of ways. Even where the lesson was not organised around a large topic, such as health for example, language work was contextualised around interesting and useful topics. For example, Dina's starting point in one lesson was comparatives and superlatives and was contextualised in relation to three topics: restaurants, advertisements and the differences between England and two other countries.

All teachers use some of the *Skills for Life* materials (in some instances because they are required to), although few of the case study teachers used them extensively. Most are *bricoleur*s, using and adapting materials as appropriate, but also using a range of other materials, including self-produced materials, course books, the media and the internet, tuned to the particular group and their interests.

Teachers replace or supplement *Skills for Life* materials in various creative ways. One is the strategic use of EFL textbooks and other published materials, which provide more linguistic form practice through activities and games. They also provide more structured and predictable progress, which some teachers exploit to create a safe and predictable classroom. Effective teachers use these EFL materials strategically where the faster pace, range of topics, challenge and 'fun' element suit the particular group. This raises questions about how far ESOL pedagogy

and materials should be seen as quite distinctive from EFL pedagogy and materials.

Another of the *bricoleur* teachers' skills is to use the shared experiences of individuals and learners as a group to generate materials. Many of the activities are learner-initiated or, where the topic is teacher-initiated, rapidly handed over to learners to develop and comment on from their own experiences.

These teachers also use a lot of 'realia', such as media texts, particularly newspapers and material downloaded from the internet, brochures, and audio and video recordings from the radio and TV. In this way, current topics and debates can be aired and learners are encouraged to use the English-speaking media to develop their skills outside the classroom:

> *Since we started doing this exercise … I have been watching the news and listening to it on the radio. It became a routine for me. I started enjoying it too.* (Turkish man, London)

Another characteristic is the variety of activities and the range of teaching and learning moments within an activity (and this variety is part of sub-scale A strategies, which correlate positively with learner progress; see Chapter 7). As well as the huge amount of collaborative talk around both teacher- and learner-initiated topics, teachers use extended learner presentations, form-focused games such as 'running dictation' and listening activities using realia such as radio recordings, role play etc. And within one activity, many different specific teaching strategies are developed. Finally, in the case study classes, there is evidence of the use of innovative and 'riskier' materials and activities. Teachers try out different approaches, raise difficult topics and stretch learners in unexpected ways. For example, Catrin aimed to elicit aesthetic judgements using postcards of paintings and Paul developed an exercise in the grammar of interaction by recording himself and a researcher discussing courses in a college prospectus. Texts on serious political topics were also used. These were all part of the *bricoleur* teachers' stance and repertoire.

8.7 Inside/outside

Although there was no statistical correlation between progress and bringing the outside into the classroom, the close connection with the outside in nearly all of the case study classes suggests that this may be a necessary (though on its own insufficient) condition for language learning. It is a strong motivating factor for learners and, as Section 8.5 suggests, one of the most effective ways of encouraging extended output and managing different types of talk, such as narrative, explanation and argument. There are two contrasting strategies that teachers use in particular for linking the inside and outside: transforming outside matters and realia into teaching items, and transforming the teacher-driven pedagogy into conversations that draw on learner experiences from outside the classroom. The first of these (linking GTS 'extended output' and 'going with the teachable moment') exploits a usually learner-initiated topic (see also Baynham and Whitfield, 2004). In the example in Extract 2, a text has prompted a discussion about the care of old people, and one student, L, talks about elderly neighbours whose grandchildren never visit them. She compares this with her own country, where a grandchild would be told to live with the grandparent and look after them. The teacher, Dina (T), suggests an alternative position to encourage the class to take up the debate, give opinions, take a relative position ('it depends') and use longer utterances with relative clauses (see Line 10):

Extract 2

1.	T:	What about, I mean, what about the child? does your child want to do that? Are they happy to do that?
2.	L:	Yes, yes
3.	T:	Yeah? They are.
4.	L:	My mum
5.	T:	Did you look after her or did she look after you?
6.	L:	Yes
7.	T:	Or did you look after each other?
8.	L:	Each other...
9.	T:	It's quite a difference
10.	L:	But it depends, you know how is the er you know very old, no child can look after her, the mum goes, not grandchildren, the old people, I look after her when very old, but when it's a normal person
11.	S:	In my country it's
12.	L:	When she's sixty or fifty-five she's quite young still but she needs some help so she got grandchildren, they help her

The second strategy, transforming the strictly pedagogic into learner conversation, is both learner- and teacher-initiated and often includes humour. These instances frequently occur when there is a form-focused activity that is relatively de-contextualised. There is a constant movement from the grammatical form to more personal narrative and opinion, engaging the whole social being in a 'conversation'. For example, in Paul's class, a picture of someone cooking sausages, used to encourage learners to practise verb tenses, soon triggers conversational talk comparing 'soft' English sausages with their superior Parisian counterparts. Similarly, correction and repair are done in conversational ways. As we have seen above, the development of cultural knowledge also tends to be done in a contingent way, with perspectives displayed on political, cultural and social issues, ranging from human rights and institutional procedures to more familial issues. Just because learners have limited English does not mean that they have limited, parochial minds.

Bringing the outside in also has a, generally unnoticed, effect on the range and sequencing of language form. Real situations bring grammar, vocabulary and socio-pragmatic features together in ways that textbooks and materials often do not.

8.8 Collaborative learning

Again there was, in the classes as a whole, no correlation between strategies observed for

promoting collaborative learning and student progress. However, the ten case study classes all scored above the mean for **creating a collaborative learning environment**. There is both a social and a cognitive element to collaborative classroom learning. The extent of this collaboration also feeds into the overall classroom ecology and strengthens social networks inside and outside the classroom, helping to produce a democratic environment. The social dimension is underpinned by a strong ideological commitment to social cohesion and learner engagement: language learning is a social process and best done in groups. Collaborative learning promotes learner agency in these classes, where learners are encouraged to plan in groups and given opportunities to critically reflect on their own learning, choose activities and decide what they want to concentrate on in future lessons.

The more cognitive dimension of collaborative learning relates to theories of socially distributed knowledge and learning. No individual learner has as much knowledge as a group. Knowledge is distributed across the group and learners learn from each other. Heterogeneity in oral language is actively exploited. As long as learners' profiles are broadly similar, any 'spikiness' can be transformed into 'smooth contours' as the strengths of different learners, both in terms of language competence and educational background, are used to support others. The following is typical of the case study classrooms. In one session, there were six changes in grouping: learners gathered together in small groups around a daily newspaper, worked in pairs on a reading text, worked on a 'jigsaw' reading with two changes of pairs, worked in small groups to prepare a poster and after each activity moved back into some whole-class review and discussion. These many opportunities to work collaboratively are much appreciated by Renata, a student from Ecuador, who echoes a widespread enjoyment in group work amongst learners overall (see Chapter 4):

> *I like this college because it's different. They make you talk more. We have small groups and you can speak, not like the other college … always here we do it in small groups to talk and I like that a lot.*

Collaborative learning is enhanced by strategic opportunities for using L1. For example, in Salima's class, it is used: to achieve rapid understanding of, for example, a conceptual grammar point or item of vocabulary, to formulate an idea initially in the L1 to plan for its reformulation in English, to do contrastive analysis of similar terms in the L1 or English and to explain procedures for doing a task. In multilingual classrooms, where the only common language is English, there is also some encouragement and exploitation of the use of L1 (or a *lingua franca*) in similar ways. However, the use of learners' L1 remains an underused resource, as the statistics show. The GTS 'supporting use of learners' L1' was the third least-used strategy (see Section 7.2).

8.9 What is not done much

These case studies have illustrated several dimensions of effective practice. There are some areas which were not observed, but which the research and pedagogic literature suggest are important. One reason for this is that these were mostly E1 and E2 classes where what learners need is not always easy to teach: for example, discourse and interactional competence. On the other hand, certain aspects of grammar, such as past tense verbs, are easy to notice and teach. Completing grammar exercises was the second most observed STS and verb tenses (especially the past tense) the most observed grammatical form taught. However, the research literature, based on the analysis of corpora of spoken language,

suggests that other grammatical features are much more frequent in everyday talk; for example, causality and other forms of temporal ordering are often more crucial to making oneself understood (Biber, 1988).

Although not observed in the case study classes, the restricted focus in many other observed classes on learners' needs as consumers of goods and services in their local community underplays the long-term study and preparation goals of many who already have professional or trade experience and qualifications and who want to move out of unemployment or underemployment. The relatively large size of ESOL groups, their heterogeneity and teachers' own limited knowledge of the particular language demands of work and training all suggest that many talented workers are not moving quickly enough into work commensurate with their skills and experience. The job interview is also a major barrier here (Roberts and Campbell, 2006).

8.10 'Professional vision' (Goodwin, 1994)

The 'professional vision' referred to in Chapter 6 describes a way of seeing/interpreting that goes beyond systematic professional knowledge. This vision, which combines knowledge, attitudes and competence, consists of ways of categorising and classifying the objects of scrutiny in a particular profession, and of selecting specific phenomena in a complex field. The professional ESOL teacher can highlight and classify a particular element of learner talk and turn it into a learning point. Categorising and highlighting are central to the ESOL teacher's capacity to react to and work with the mass of learner talk generated in the classroom and turn it into learning.

The case study teachers, who work contingently with this learner-generated talk and who reflect on their practice, display 'professional vision'. This is what sets this group apart from those who are still apprentices. Those who are untrained or under-trained in teaching ESOL have learnt to manage the teaching and learning but have not yet developed a professional vision. This vision is not only necessary for any classroom practitioner but also for any evaluator/inspector of an ESOL classroom, since so much work in the classroom is concerned with the rapid response and classification of learner language into teachable and noticeable learning moments.

ESOL teachers with professional vision are reflective about their practices and work in a contingent and responsive way. They are self-critical, critical of demands that undermine their professional practice and confident in trying out potentially risky activities in the classroom. They 'know' the students in their classes and can 'see' how materials can be selected and exploited because they are confident in classifying and highlighting a particular phenomenon or issue as it arises. Learning the practices that constitute professional vision takes time. Interestingly, many of those who articulated it clearly or showed it in action in their classes had an apprenticeship in EFL, often abroad, where there were more opportunities to become part of a community of expert practitioners. Those who had entered the ESOL profession over the last few years, and had had only short training courses, had a less clear professional vision and were more reliant on the systematic and more routine elements of teaching ESOL to adults, which have developed out of institutional interpretations of government curricular and funding policies.

9 Conclusions, implications and recommendations

9.1 Learners and their progress

The learners

1. ESOL learners in the study reflect the increasing super-diversity of British cities in terms of their country of birth (58), languages (50), educational background (12 per cent with university qualifications, 10 per cent illiterate in their expert language), employment experience and skills, and immigration status. The cultural and linguistic landscape is constantly changing, and the profiles in 2004, when fieldwork for the project began, are different from those of today, owing to, for example, the accession of new member states to the EU. Broad categorisations of learners do not easily account for this degree of diversity and change. Both teacher-training courses and local policy initiatives need to understand this super-diversity.

2. There are also common factors: relative youth (over 80 per cent are under 40); constraints because of lack of childcare; and, for many, the stresses of being asylum-seekers, living with fear, uncertainty and recent trauma.

3. The average length of time in the UK is below five years, which suggests that newcomers and relative newcomers are keen to learn English on arrival. But about 20 per cent are long-term residents, who have been prevented from learning earlier by family and work reasons.

4. The learner interviews show that ESOL learners have complex and often difficult lives, yet they are highly motivated, and most are frustrated by the lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom.

5. They are, therefore, very positive about group learning, the opportunities to talk in English that this offers, and the social communal nature of ESOL classrooms. This strong social function of group classes is a crucial element in helping relative newcomers to 'belong'. Individualised learning in the form of ILPs was not mentioned by learners as being relevant to their learning.

6. Although many learners have found 'survival English' a good starting point, most get along well without it or wish to move on from simple dialogues about obtaining services or going shopping. They have considerable experience, knowledge, skills and social and cultural capital. They need interactional competence for obtaining (better) employment, and technical and academic literacies for further training, as well as language for pursuing personal development.

7. Learners' different goals and backgrounds suggest the need for more specialised teaching for some groups, rather than assuming that classroom differentiation can deal with 'spiky profiles'.

8. These widely different goals, especially relating to employment, are not always being met by existing provision, since teachers cannot be expected to be experts in employment and careers advice.

9. Most learners are young, with considerable cultural capital, and many have skills and professions to offer the job market, if only they could speed up the long language learning journey. But they also have stressful, complex lives, face negativity and racism, and may have to downsize their work expectations and identities because of the (often unnecessarily high) communicative demands of institutional selection processes.

Learners' progress

1. Virtually all learners made progress over the short period between the two assessments.

2. Attendance correlates positively but weakly with progress, so while classes are important for learners, our student interviews show that some find ways of learning outside the class and others attend but may be too stressed and traumatised to benefit as much as they might.

3. Length of time in the UK correlates significantly and negatively with progress. So, the less time the students in our study had spent in the UK, the greater the progress they made on the test. There was a significant difference in profile between the recent arrivals (those who had been in the UK for up to five years) in our student sample and the long-term resident group (those who had been in the UK for more than five years). Although both groups made progress, the former, perhaps due to their higher average educational backgrounds, made more progress. The longer-term residents tend to be older, with less schooling and lower literacy levels in their expert language, and are more likely to be attending less intensive courses. Any of these factors might contribute towards slower progress. There are various reasons why older learners might not have acquired English when they first arrived, two of the most important being work commitments and lack of access to childcare.

4. Learner interviews showed that many attributed their progress to the quality of the classes. Evidence of their stated improvements in confidence and competence related to an increase in the number and variety of social situations they were able to handle well, and to the enormous pleasure this gave them: in work and training, dealing with health professionals and street-level bureaucrats, speaking to teachers, participating in local communities and communicating with their own children.

5. The majority of the learners are relatively young and learn fast. This year's keen new arrivals, if not offered adequate provision, are the future's long-term residents facing more barriers to learning. This group could benefit from some of the faster-paced approaches associated with EFL, which suggests that the pedagogic distinctions between EFL and ESOL are now less relevant. Provision for long-term residents is also essential; for people who have been unable to learn English in the past because of other commitments and constraints, ESOL classes are often their first chance to do so.

9.2 ESOL provision and outside factors

ESOL provision

1. Most classes observed were provided by FE colleges, either at their main sites or at community sites or in local community centres, so they share many of the FE management requirements and audit regimes, which teachers in their interviews saw as not fitting with the reality of ESOL learners' needs.

2. There are major differences between main-site FE provision and community centres. Community-based classes can be invaluable stepping stones but they cannot provide a range

of provision. They are seen as marginal and separate and often have poor facilities. They lack adequate structures for both student and management support as well as opportunities for learning progression. Also, community-based teachers are often inexperienced. However, there are also examples of inspirational teachers who are effective despite these constraints. Students are reached by these classes who could not be reached in any other way.

3.   The long-term resident learners are most likely to be in these classes. They are also most likely to need to learn basic literacy skills.

4.   Learners are often held back in low-level classes because of low literacy skills, although they are competent in spoken English. This is because of placement tests and the fact that there are fewer options for this group in community-based classes.

5.   The modest positive correlations between progress and group size suggest that neither very large classes nor very small ones benefit the learners.

6.   Although teachers with professional vision manage the heterogeneous ESOL classroom, very mixed levels do not serve learners well, especially where there are marked differences in literacy, as the learner interviews indicate. Within-class differentiation may not be the best strategy for addressing such heterogeneity. Our data raise questions about 'effective for whom?'

7.   ESOL classes are distinctive from literacy, numeracy and ICT classes in several ways: the focus on talk as an end as well as a means; the focus on group processes; the diversity of the learners, who range from those with no formal education to highly qualified professionals; and the experiences of the learners, many of whom are living with trauma and great uncertainty about their life in the UK. All these have implications for the learning structure, inspection framework and management of ESOL provision.

Outside factors

1.   Many of the factors that distract from rather than enhance effective practice relate to policy and institutional requirements. These shape a top-down notion of 'effective practice', which is not always attuned to the reality of ESOL teaching and learning. This is evidenced both in the teacher interviews and in the observed classrooms. However, there were also examples where paper trails supported learning rather than merely being evidence for auditing purposes and where a collegial atmosphere encouraged novice learners to learn from each other.

2.   The majority of teachers in our study were critical of ILPs: the focus on individual language learning goals and SMART targets were at the expense of group processes and classroom interaction. Teachers considered that they betray a misunderstanding of how language is used and learnt and are not suitable for Entry level learners (certainly at E1 and E2) who have not yet aquired the analytic language used by teachers in negotiating them. However, teachers were appreciative of the one-to-one tutorial time, provided it did not eat into classroom time.

3.   More than 50 per cent of the 40 ESOL teachers interviewed were in hourly-paid employment, with the consequent insecurity this creates. Low status and insecurity can add to feelings of lack of control, which, combined with relative inexperience, can undermine professionalism.

9.3 What ESOL classes look like

1. ESOL classrooms are extraordinarily heterogeneous and lessons are largely made up of talk. As well as being the main medium of learning, talk is what is being learnt. Talk is work. Effective practitioners, therefore, have to be flexible. They must sustain learner involvement by differentiating through their own spoken language choices and on-the-spot analysis and responsiveness to learner talk. Turning talk into learning and (classroom) learning into talk (for outside) requires a thorough understanding of second language learning and pedagogy.

2. General Teaching Strategies (GTS) and Strategies for Learner Involvement (SLI) work together as a measure of teaching quality. There were modest but significant correlations between a sub-group of these strategies, **balance and variety**, and gains on test scores.

3. The correlation of **balance and variety** with progress, together with the most observed strategies: **creating a safe learning environment** (GTS) and **allowing learners sufficient time on task** (SLI) provide an overall picture of the core strategies and values in ESOL classes. By contrast, **encouraging learners to evaluate and be critical** was the least observed GTS, and providing the opportunity for learners to **offer evaluative or critical responses to text and topics** was the least observed SLI. This is in line with the Condelli et al (2003) research.

4. The most frequently observed GTS, **creating a safe learning environment** and **allowing learners sufficient time on task,** showed that teachers oriented lessons towards learners and their socio-psychological barriers to learning. Understanding learner characteristics and experiences is an important part of teacher training.

5. Of the GTS and SLI groupings, **balance and variety** and **planning and explicitness** were significantly more frequently observed than **creating a collaborative learning environment** and **connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives**. So, teacher-oriented activities were more in evidence than those that promoted learning involvement and relating outside to inside. What is more, there were modest but significant correlations between strategies promoting **balance and variety** in the classrooms and gains on test scores. Of course, this does not mean that strategies for planning and explicitness, creating a collaborative learning environment and relating inside to outside are not relevant to effective classroom practice. What this does suggest, however, is that they may be necessary but not sufficient. It may be that the **balance and variety** strategies represent a kind of core of pedagogical activity because they balance fluency and accuracy with a variety of activities and materials that keep learners engaged. These can transform everyday activities, such as chatting and sharing experiences, into activities that will support and promote language learning. The case studies illustrate this, for example, in the way in which these classrooms combine clear pedagogical goals with a variety of real materials and learner-initiated activities.

6. The importance of balance and variety is further evidenced in the finding that learners performed best on the grammar and vocabulary sub-component of the test when they were taught neither too much nor too little of each.

7. The descriptive findings from the Specific Teaching Strategies (STS) data support the findings outlined above. There is a prevalence of classrooms that are strong on teacher-centred activity, planning and organising, and promoting the core macro-skills of speaking and listening, but less strong on making use of learners' L1, exploiting or developing their metalinguistic knowledge, encouraging critical reflection, and engagement with texts and

activities leading to more open-ended reflective talk. There is also little emphasis on text and discourse-level features and related activities that might encourage extended talk in different genres.

8.   As well as the top-down requirements that can affect classroom environments, teachers' stance and, where it is articulated, 'professional vision', are the most important influences on teachers' effective practice. The teacher interviews shed light on significant differences in stance: some relatively engaged with learners, others more detached, some language-oriented, some lifeworld-oriented. These different stances can be equally effective, provided they are supported by a clear professional vision, as the case studies illustrate.

9.   The difference between novice and experienced ESOL teachers (in their stance and practice) is crucial in understanding effective teaching and learning. From class observations and teacher interviews, it is clear that less experienced teachers are over-reliant on the AECC and its associated materials, and tend to teach scripted classes which are not attuned to classroom diversity. They are fluent in the language of *Skills for Life* policy, but cannot articulate a clear professional vision from which to make professional decisions.

9.4 ESOL pedagogy and quality

1.   The ten case studies of effective practice (25 per cent of the total number of classes researched) pull together high scores on teaching strategies, learner evaluation, teacher interviews, classroom field notes and audio recordings. All of these teachers are experienced and articulate a clear professional vision (as do many others whom we could not analyse in depth).

2.   Effective practice happens with teachers who can balance the conflicting demands, both external and internal, arising from policy and management requirements and learners' lives and goals. Managing the potentially fragile classroom ecology, where so many vulnerable people are gathered together, requires exceptional and flexible personal qualities as well as sound teaching strategies.

3.   Elements of effective ESOL practice illustrated here include:
     - Clear planning, both strategic and 'online' (ie responsive and contingent), and explicit framing and metalanguage.
     - The *bricoleur* teacher, who assembles materials and activities creatively, inventively and in principled ways.
     - Encouraging and supporting extended 'talk from within' (when learners have an urgent need to communicate about their own needs and problems) combined with planned and on-the-spot form-focused work.
     - Collaborative group work where distributed knowledge is managed and exploited.
     - Using the classroom as a place to learn from and for the outside world, including language socialisation as well as language acquisition.
     - Constant re-visiting and re-working of linguistic items in different contexts.
     - Safe and fun learning.

9.5 Limitations

Although the first and largest study of its kind in England, this project still represents a
relatively small group of learners and focuses on spoken language. It cannot, therefore,
encompass the variety of learners and classes that are fully representative of ESOL in
England, nor has it attempted to look at the rest of the UK. The focus on spoken language
means that key issues of ESOL literacy have only been incidentally addressed, although our
data on learners identify these as worthy of future research. For example, it is clear that
classes in which both highly literate professionals and those without literacy in their expert
language are taught together cannot be effective. For practical reasons, we were only able to
interview about 30 per cent of the core sample group of learners, although we consider that it
is worth putting resources into interviewing learners in their expert language. Other
important elements that we could not examine here were the experience and progress of
ESOL learners on non-ESOL designated courses (although these issues were addressed in
two other NRDC studies).[5]

9.6 Implications and recommendations

Learners and their progress

1. Virtually all learners made progress at the levels researched (E1, E2, E3). This progress is
    clear both from test scores and learner interviews.

2. Relative newcomers (those who have lived in the UK for five years or less) make more rapid
    progress than long-term residents. These newer arrivals need adequate provision now so that
    they do not become the future long-term residents facing more barriers to learning. Provision
    therefore for asylum-seekers and others new to the UK is an efficient use of resources.

3. Given that long-term residents have a different profile and rate of learning from newcomers,
    appropriate provision, particularly in relation to literacy, is necessary. For the long-term
    residents, ESOL classes are often their first chance to learn English because commitments
    and constraints have prevented them from doing so in the past.

4. Our study suggests that most learners are hungry for more provision, for greater
    opportunities to learn English outside the ESOL classroom and for employment. Colleges
    could encourage learners to join other classes, make informal links with other students and
    provide employment advice and inter-agency support within mainstream provision.

5. Our learner interviews suggest that teachers need more help to support traumatised
    refugees and asylum-seekers, including training themselves and support from bilingual
    counsellors.

What ESOL classes look like

1. In the ESOL classes we studied, of the four groups of teaching strategies and learner
    involvement strategies, those that promoted **balance and variety** and **planning and
    explicitness** were significantly more in evidence than those promoting **a collaborative**

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5 See Roberts, C et al (2005). *Embedded teaching and learning of adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL*. London: NRDC and
Roberts, C et al (2004). *English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)*: *Case studies of provision, learners' needs and resources*.
London: NRDC.

learning environment and **connecting the classroom with learners' outside lives**.

2. There were modest but significant correlations between strategies promoting balance and variety in the classrooms and gains on test scores. This group of strategies can be seen as core strategies because they balance fluency and accuracy with a variety of activities and materials that keep learners engaged.

3. The importance of balance and variety is further evidenced in the finding that learners performed best on the grammar and vocabulary sub-component of the test when they were taught neither too much nor too little of them: it is possible both to overdo and underdo the teaching of grammar and vocabulary.

4. Our study demonstrates that there is a range of good practice, most of it more focused on teacher-oriented activities than on learner ones, and promoting the core macro skills of speaking and listening.

5. Talk is work in the ESOL classroom and these classes are largely made up of talk. The effective practitioner has to be flexible and needs to be able to turn talk into learning by on-the-spot analysis and responsiveness to learner talk. This requires a thorough understanding of second language learning and pedagogy.

6. Less experienced teachers are over-reliant on the AECC and associated materials and cannot articulate a clear professional vision, including the flexibility of turning talk into learning. A major shift is needed in teacher-training policy away from generic approaches to teaching and learning towards second language teaching and learning. (This recommendation supports the new initiatives in teacher education for ESOL.) This shift should include building teacher-led action research and self-reflective practice into teacher-training courses.

ESOL provision and outside factors

1. While good community provision does exist, classes held in community centres often need to be better supported, with better facilities, more experienced teachers who can offer specialist teaching in literacy, and a greater range of provision. The long-term residents, who make slower progress than the other group, often attend these classes, and so more attention and resources are needed to bridge the gap between this group and the newcomers. Colleges could take steps to strengthen links between off-site and main-site provision with visits and exchanges. Better crèche facilities on main sites would enable learners to switch from community centres to these sites.

2. There are centres where the type of provision is not tuned to effective ESOL practice, often because funding requirements are tied to outcomes that take too little account of language-learning processes. Language development is incremental, involving repetition and recycling over extended periods. Cutting up learning into short, bite-size modules and SMART targets shows no understanding of incremental second language learning processes.

3. The super-diversity of ESOL learners cannot be fully catered for by differentiation in the classroom alone. Pathways or trajectories through provision need to be developed which cater for specialisations, including more fast-tracking for those with skills, high quality careers advice and more specialist literacy provision. These pathways are more specialised but should not be shorter. They must be flexible enough to ensure that the learning is not reductive, and to respond to the changing ESOL populations.

4. The pedagogic distinction between EFL and ESOL has increasingly less credibility.

5. The continuing lack of permanent and full-time employment experienced by over 50 per cent of the ESOL teachers in this study needs to be addressed for the recommended further professional development to be fully effective.

ESOL pedagogy and quality enhancement

1. The case study teachers show that effective ESOL practice combines all four groups of teaching and learning strategies and also teacher qualities such as balancing conflicting demands and working with vulnerable learners. These teachers can plan on the spot and, like *bricoleurs*, can pull together whatever is at hand to make the class work. These '*bricoleur* teachers' are eclectic in using and designing materials and activities to be highly learner responsive, and this eclecticism is underpinned by a clear professional vision. The case studies can be used in teacher development programmes to illustrate aspects of effective practice.

2. The GTS and SLI coding schemes used in the study could also be used to inform professional development.

3. Expert professionals, many of whom feel undermined by the inspection framework and institutional requirements, should be part of any consultation on good practice in ESOL.

4. Since talk is work in the ESOL classroom, inspectors and those who observe and evaluate teachers require an understanding of language processes in order to develop criteria for observing talk and the contingent ways in which teachers differentiate their own language . At the minimum, some training in noticing how teachers use and build in differences in language level is needed.

Conclusions

1. The two most important factors in shaping ESOL practice are the overall policy environment and the professional vision and expertise of teachers. Our teacher interview data, however, suggests that the interpretations by providers of many of the policy initiatives show insufficient understanding of language processes and ESOL learners' needs. In particular, a focus on individual learning and ILPs can be at the expense of group processes and classroom talk and cannot be negotiated with low-level language speakers.

2. Teacher expertise and vision are the most important resources for effective ESOL practice, and both initial teacher training and CPD need to reflect this by putting teaching and learning processes at the heart of teacher education policy development. Greater subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy need to be built into teacher training and more reflective practice built into CPD.

3. Our study shows that there is no magic bullet for effective ESOL practice. The major resource that can make or mar the most promising methodology or initiative is the expertise and professionalism of ESOL teachers. This professionalism draws on both subject and subject-teaching knowledge and on CPD that encourages an interpretive and reflective stance on teaching and learning.

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Glossary

AECC
Adult ESOL Core Curriculum

AECC materials
ESOL materials produced by the DfES, mapped to the corresponding codes in the AECC

Bricoleur (*bricoleur* **teachers)**
A ´*bricoleur*´ is a French handyman who uses whatever is at hand to do the job. The term is used widely in cultural studies to indicate a fusion of disparate ideas, materials or methods.

CELTA
Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults

CPD
Continuing professional development

Cronbach's alpha
See Reliability coefficient, below

DfES
Department for Education and Skills

EEPP
ESOL Effective Practice Project

EFL
English as a Foreign Language

Entry levels 1–3 (E1, E2, E3)
The lowest three levels on the National Qualifications Framework

ESOL
English for Speakers of Other Languages

FE
Further education

GTS
General Teaching Strategy

ILP
Individual learning plan

L1
First or expert language

L2
Second or other language

LA
Local authority. Previously called Local Education Authority (LEA)

LLN
The three *Skills for Life* areas of adult literacy, language and numeracy

NRDC
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Realia
Real materials used in the classroom, e.g. bureaucratic forms, leaflets, instructions, tickets etc, rather than materials designed for pedagogic purposes.

Reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha)
A measure indicating the internal consistency, or reliability, of a multiple item scale. Alpha is based on the average correlation of each item in the scale with every other item. It can range from 0 (indicating very low internal consistency) to 1 (indicating perfect internal consistency).

Skills for Life
The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy in England

SLA
Second language acquisition

SLI
Strategy for Learner Involvement

SMART target
Identifiable learning outcome (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related)

Spiky profile
A learner is described as having a spiky profile if his or her abilities are stronger in some elements of a subject than in others; where, in literacy, for example, reading skills are more highly developed than writing skills.
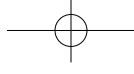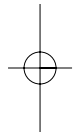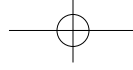
STS
Specific Teaching Strategy

VSO
Voluntary Service Overseas
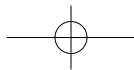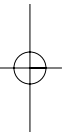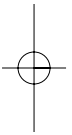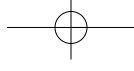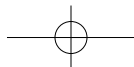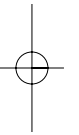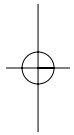
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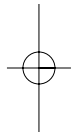
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