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**Read like a butterfly, write like a bee, discuss:
Evaluating conversation in an integrated
circle process in the ESOL classroom**

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requirements of the University of Sunderland for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis considers a pedagogy that combined reading circle (Furr, 2009), writing circle (Gunnery, 2007) and community of enquiry (Lipman, 2003), used with adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the Further Education sector. It investigates the integration of these circle activities and evaluates the impact and potential of this novel ESOL pedagogy.

Two cohorts of Entry 3 ESOL students participated in circles that structured collaborative language learning using discussion to build understandings of texts using allocated, rotating roles before producing their own written tasks. The focus on circles as a means of informal communication and learning prompted the research question: How does an integrated circle pedagogy impact the classroom experience?

I review types of informal conversation (Sennett, 2012; 2018), dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2017) and consider critical responses to dialogic discourse (Burbules, 2007) which inform the synthesis of circle methods.

Action research (McNiff, 2014) is the iterative research method I used to evaluate the pedagogical practice. The use of narrative accounts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) represents participant experience, whilst quantitative assessment results provides supplementary data.

Findings indicate the circle process impacted on the quality of conversation in five areas. It supported participants to pool language knowledge which facilitated reciprocal learning. It supported students to share life experiences which transformed ideas about the wider world in some cases. Collaboration fostered relationship building and this encouraged the development of an independent learning community (Lipman, 2003; Biesta, 2006). Finally, it demonstrated the importance to the role of the teacher as facilitator of balancing controlled support (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004) with freer learning spaces where the autonomy of conversational 'beginnings' could emerge (Arendt, 1977; Biesta, 2014).

The findings have confirmed tensions in ESOL pedagogy between language accuracy and language fluency. Accuracy features in a data and outputs-led

curriculum with teacher controlled practice to develop uniform language skills swiftly. By contrast, fluency brings a slower pace to the classroom but benefits from student-directed discussions to influence classroom activity.

My research into the impact of integrated circles offers a way to explore the dilemmas and opportunities in ESOL pedagogy. It thinks about teaching and learning as a communicative, co-operative experience carefully nurtured and recommends making more time for fluency to contribute to a more rounded language education.

Key words: ESOL; autonomy; conversation; pedagogy; skills

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Chapter 1: Problem and Context

Introduction

In the United Kingdom (UK), the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classroom in Further Education (FE) can be a rewarding place: an opportunity for learners, with all the hopes, dreams and aspirations of living in a new country, to learn with peers and teachers and to share both the challenges and lightbulb moments of language learning and exchanged experiences; a place to find friends, create a community and establish identity; and discover how what is learnt with others can be used for individual advancement. The classroom is a positive and creative space.

The ESOL classroom can be a complex place: teachers striving to find a balance between both the type of teaching and learning that students are seeking, and yet fulfilling the requirements of the policy and funding regimes that enable that class to run – regimes which are introduced and replaced, as priorities come and go, as governments wax and wane, as public opinion regarding immigration and migrant workers ebbs and flows. The learning experience can be buffeted by changing forces which impact on ESOL; forces which often have less to do with education policy and more to do with the politics of immigration, the economy and integration. The classroom is a complicated and restricted space.

This twin view of ESOL underlines the tensions teachers face between meeting their pedagogical values on the one hand and the pressures of inconsistent policy approaches to ESOL on the other. These pressures have long been difficult to resist given that ESOL students and practitioners are frequently inaudible and powerless in the face of policy demands, leading to a marginalised status (Cook and Simpson, 2009). Currently, the ESOL classroom still exists in a neglected corner of education.

This describes the context in which I have worked as an ESOL teacher with adult learners in FE over the past fourteen years. It is by being conscious of the tensions in my workplace and reflecting on how to respond to them that my teaching has also become my researching. With a dual role as teacher-researcher I examine my working environment, my practice and its impact on the classroom

with the aim to make positive changes. This research is undertaken because it is my role to deliver the required ESOL curriculum and through integrated circles I explore the dilemmas and the opportunities present within ESOL pedagogy to seek better ways to operate for learners. I aim to illustrate the development, implementation and impacts of an integrated circle process which helps to clarify the terms of 'accuracy' and 'fluency' in ESOL where the former is tied to external official assessment criteria and the latter offers space for lived experience for learning, thus providing an insight for other practitioners and their classrooms.

This project is based on self-reflecting on my own workplace and my role, and with the students in my classrooms. This has led me to action research as a teacher investigating a gap between my workplace and my teaching experience, looking for ways to improve existing practice. Action research enables me to systematically consider practices which constrain ESOL, to explore previous circles and to plan for change. It also offers a degree of flexibility when testing out change to adapt to changing local conditions and to observe, analyse and reflect on the initial steps so as to amend action as the research progresses in an iterative process.

The principles of action research provide the foundation for this research as an evolving, evaluative and reflective project to cumulatively build towards a better view of the nature of circles in this particular setting through the learners' and my own unfolding experiences of it. Action research enables a weaving of the collective but diverse ESOL voices and circle data central to the uniqueness of one qualitative investigation. The participatory nature is inclusive and democratic as it grows from the living classroom. Critical reflections and developing conclusions may offer a better understanding of the classroom and directions for future practice to make a difference for the learners.

The purpose of this study is to investigate circle methods, which are often used separately for the teaching and learning of reading, writing and speaking and listening skills, as an integrated pedagogy for adult ESOL learners and what impact it may have on classroom experience. It might prove effective in supporting the functional language competence demanded by national policy for learners to participate and contribute to British society which is tied up with the theme of accuracy. The integrated circle might also support learners with a more fluid use of

language for self-expression and to build shared understandings about the world lived in and experienced which is related to the theme of fluency. The twin focus might be a way to navigate between the two views of ESOL and contribute to developments in ESOL pedagogy with particular focus on the role of conversation in an integrated circle process.

This chapter is in three parts. Part one sets out the national backdrop to ESOL provision. The second part establishes the local setting for ESOL and part three charts my previous action research with circles as precursors to this integrated circle project.

This introductory description of the policy and institutional context, alongside the account of circle iterations, will allow me to mark out key themes to explore in more detail in the following literature review related to different types of conversation for informal communication and learning, and different views of pedagogy that encourage language fluency and accuracy.

Part 1: ESOL policy

A story of immigration, economics and social cohesion

The history of the UK's involvement in the teaching of ESOL can be traced back to Britain's colonial past (Crystal, 2012), when the English language was exported in pursuit of national interests and used as a means to establish and exert economic, political and social power over colonised nations. This focused the teaching of English outside of the UK in a bid to support British international trading aims and ambitions. Whilst this set English on a path towards becoming a lingua franca in international affairs, there was also a need for ESOL teaching on the domestic front as the result of several periods of migration which created key moments for ESOL teaching.

Rosenberg (2007) and Sunderland (2009) have charted these moments, noting that ESOL has been a feature in the UK since the arrival of the first immigrants. The earliest official records of refugees coming to the UK date back to the twelfth century (Rutter, 2000, cited in Sunderland, 2009, p.19), and the arrival of the Huguenots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coined the term 'refugee' for

the first time (Howatt and Widdowson, 2004, cited in Rosenberg, 2007, p.1). Successive waves of immigration eventually led to the development of ESOL, as it is understood today, as government-funded English language provision for adult migrants settled permanently in the UK.

Rosenberg's (ibid.) map of the links between international politics, UK foreign policy and domestic legislation, influenced by the perceptions of the general public about migrants in the UK, starts with the 1870 Education Act, which first established state-funded education in England and Wales. Thereafter, the history of ESOL has been shaped by the arrival of Jewish, Belgium and Spanish refugees following European conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, immigrants from the Commonwealth, most noticeably in the 1950s - 1970s, and a periodic movement of political refugees and economic migrants from around the world up to the present time.

From these events, Sunderland (2009) has identified that the first adult ESOL learners, as currently understood in the post-16 education sector, were those who arrived from the Commonwealth in the 1950s to contribute to the post-war economic reconstruction of the UK. Their families also came to settle here, creating ESOL demand in work-based training, in state-funded provision such as in schools, colleges and prisons, and in community and voluntary education. This was most often in isolated pockets of practice around the country depending on local needs, and mainly delivered by volunteers.

The creation of the National Association for Teaching English as a Second Language to Adults in 1977, subsequently renamed the National Association for Teaching English and Other Community Languages to Adults (NATECLA) in 1985, provided a body to concentrate and support the varied voices of ESOL. From its inception, NATECLA has sought among other aims to place ESOL within the context of changing UK economic and social conditions and to give a voice to practitioners and learners at a national level.

NATECLA gave a professional platform for the development of ESOL, including contributing to government inquiries on the national context for ESOL. This included the 1999 Moser enquiry '*Improving Literacy and Numeracy: A Fresh Start*' (DfEE, 1999). The Moser report was extended in August 2000 by '*Breaking*

the Language Barriers' (DfEE, 2000) which explained the range of ESOL learners, identified the scale of need and made recommendations. This led the way to ESOL provision being drawn into a more co-ordinated policy, known as Skills for Life (SfL) under the New Labour government of 1997 - 2010, which formalised practice and made 'good' teaching easier to recognise.

The SfL strategy of 2001 was a new national policy for the teaching and learning of Adult Literacy, Language and Numeracy with national Core Curricula for the three subject areas. The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (AECC) (DfES, 2001) was underpinned with a set of national language standards at word, sentence and text levels and enabled students to work towards external accreditation in the three modes of Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening at five different levels: Entry 1 (E1), Entry 2 (E2), Entry 3 (E3), Level 1 (L1) and Level 2 (L2).

SfL, as reviewed by Gregson and Nixon (2011), provided professional qualifications for tutors which formalised and gave structure to their pre-existing, but previously unrecognised work. However, it also resulted in a time-consuming, micromanaged system with a growing focus on tutors needing to complete paperwork, and evidence the setting and achievement of targets from initial and diagnostic assessments (Ball, 2003). Targets were formally written as Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) and mapped to the AECC, which restricted learning to narrow contexts. There was a growing tension between tutors finding the time needed to plan and develop lessons to fully address learners' needs and the requirements of meeting the SfL policy.

Teachers did welcome the fact that SfL brought unprecedented central investment in ESOL, yet this financial backing was not to be sustained. Cook and Simpson (2008, pp.4-7) have pointed out that funding decisions over financing and eligibility have to be made by governments planning national language-provision policies. Decisions for ESOL in the UK are complicated by the high demand for classes against an inconsistent funding commitment. Further, the House of Commons Briefing paper, *'Adult ESOL in England'*, showed that funding for ESOL in the nation decreased by 60% in real terms, between 2009/10 and 2015/16. This coincided with a 38% drop in participation over the same period as it became increasingly difficult for learners to access classes (Foster and Bolton, 2017, p.3).

The period incorporated the Conservative - Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010 - 2015) that envisioned a 'Big Society'. It aimed "to achieve fairness and opportunity for all... to draw on the skills and expertise of people across the country as we respond to the social, political and economic challenges Britain faces" (2010). However, in a time of global economic crisis the implementation of a national austerity programme entailed making deeper funding cuts.

Changes to policy had already been introduced when automatic fee remission was withdrawn from 2007/08 and fees were introduced for ESOL courses. Only people in receipt of certain means tested benefits (and their unwaged dependents), and asylum seekers who had been waiting over six months for their asylum claim to be processed, qualified for full funding.

However, there was a growing recognition that ESOL had an integral role to play in strengthening the UK's economic future. The Leitch Report, *'Prosperity for All in the Global Economy: World Class Skills'* (HMSO, 2006) reviewed the UK's long term skills needs and called for 95% of British adults to have basic numeracy and literacy by 2020. It included a reference to the importance of ESOL for 'making the UK a world leader in skills' (pp.61-63). The result was to tie ESOL closely to provision based on delivering employability skills.

An example of the link to employment-focused provision is in *'Skills for Sustainable Growth'* (BIS, 2010). This policy further restricted full-funding for ESOL courses to those in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment Support Allowance (in the Work Related Activity Group). Funding for ESOL in the workplace was withdrawn. Public funds were sharply directed towards courses assisting those whose level of English language created a barrier to finding work, above also assisting those already employed to progress in work and, by extension, in their contributions to society.

At the same time, questions were being raised about community cohesion, integration and national security in the UK, especially in the aftermath of the Twin Towers attack on 11th September 2001 in the USA and the London bombings on 7th July 2005. The fallout was the introduction of citizenship tests under Nationality, Immigration and Asylum legislation and the inclusion of citizenship content in

ESOL classes, connecting the classroom with immigration and assimilation policies.

In March 2009, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) published an updated SfL strategy in *'Skills for Life: Changing lives'* identifying ESOL learners as a priority group. Further, in May of the same year, DIUS issued *'A New Approach to ESOL'*, setting out the government's intention to prioritise ESOL funding to settled groups and shift decisions about provision to the local level to support community cohesion and social integration.

The broader advantages of ESOL beyond employment skills were recognised in the 2014 Demos report, *'On Speaking Terms'* which highlighted the role of ESOL 'to unlock migrant capabilities, save costs to public services in the long term and promote a more integrated and socially cohesive society'. Recommendations included the development of a national ESOL strategy for England. Since then, a number of ESOL stakeholders have echoed the call, including NIACE (now the Learning and Work Institute), NATECLA and HOLEX.

Foster and Bolton (2017, p.4) record that in addition to ESOL funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), through the Adult Education Budget in England, a further £8.45 million was allocated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to six projects delivering community-based English language provision between 2013/14 and 2014/15. These funds were targeted at English language programmes to help integrate participants into their local communities and move towards employment.

In January 2016, David Cameron announced a new £20 million community fund to teach English to isolated Muslim women, controversial for its stereotyped views about the dangers to social cohesion certain groups pose. Later, in July, the government announced a plan to initially allocate £3 million to the six providers of the community-based English language programme to allow them to provide tuition up to the end of March 2017. The Government added that it would invite applicants to run new programmes from 2017.

In the meantime, Refugee Action published *'Let Refugees Learn'* (May 2016) highlighting that the overall reductions in funding meant refugee learners were

finding it increasingly difficult to enrol in classes and that the lack of a national ESOL strategy in England impacted on the quality of provision available. These findings were echoed in April 2017, when the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees published, *'Refugees Welcome?'* looking at how government policies supported refugees in the UK.

ESOL provision and policy came under review in the Casey report (2016) on opportunity and integration. It highlighted concerns regarding the possible disadvantages caused by 'English language proficiency issues' among certain groups which stood out 'strongly as a barrier to progress' in relation to integration and economic success. It included recommendations that central government should support a new programme to help improve community cohesion with support for projects including 'further targeted English language provision', to build more resilient communities and to review whether current provision is sufficiently coordinated and meeting those who need it most. The Government responded in March 2018 with the *'Integrated Communities Strategy'* Green Paper.

However, general attitudes towards immigration at this time did not necessarily reflect the Casey view of integration. Public feeling, influenced by the national austerity programme in place since the global economic crisis of 2007/08 with sustained reductions in public spending, increasing costs of living and rising unemployment, was highly charged.

Following the general election in 2015, the coalition was replaced by a Conservative government. As part of the general election campaign, a Conservative manifesto commitment had been to hold a referendum on the British exit from the European Union (EU). A key issue for the leave campaign focused on immigration, including numbers arriving from Europe seeking job opportunities and the impact this economic migration was seen to have on UK employment.

On Thursday 23rd June 2016, with a turnout of 72.2%, 17.4 million people (51.89%) voted to leave the EU. This led to Cameron's resignation and Theresa May's appointment as Prime Minister (13 July 2016 - 24 July 2019). After a period of negotiation with the EU, May announced her plans for a Brexit agreement on 15 November 2018 which included a strong statement to end the right to free

movement of European migrants and plans to establish a skills-based immigration criteria.

Britain was on course to leave the EU on 29 March 2019. However, ongoing domestic disagreement over the deal, which came to centre on concerns about the economic effects Brexit could have on trade, investment and employment opportunities, and the question of the Irish border with the UK post-Brexit, meant that Parliament rejected Theresa May's Brexit Withdrawal Agreement three times and the EU extended the leave deadline to 31st October 2019.

Support for May and her vision of Brexit leached away in light of the economic uncertainties, the virtually impossible task of finding political consensus over the withdrawal arrangement and a growing public frustration with the parties' inability to resolve the Brexit question. May resigned as Conservative Leader on 7th June. This paved the way for a leadership contest to decide the new Prime Minister which was won by Boris Johnson, who commenced his term in office on 24th July 2019. A post-Brexit free trade agreement was eventually reached with the EU on 24th December 2020 and Britain formally left the bloc on 31st December 2020.

The sheer diversity of views between the political parties and among party members towards Brexit created uncertainty with a focus on trading, business, employment and economic priorities. Immigration is wrapped up inside these priorities as related to the economic and social value of freedom of movement, workers' rights and citizens' rights. For example, immigration control was one of the key factors in the 2016 referendum which triggered Brexit.

Johnson's first speech as Prime Minister included some of the issues that set the context for this thesis. The theme of immigration was reflected in 'a guarantee to the 3.2 million EU nationals now living and working among us' and their 'contribution to our society'. The theme of cohesion was presented as 'uniting our country, answering at last the plea of the forgotten people and the left-behind towns by physically and literally renewing the ties that bind us together', with pledges to increase police numbers and funding for social care and pupils in compulsory education, and to improve transport links and broadband services. These promises were linked to the national economy and the UK's role in international commerce to 'level up across Britain with higher wages, and a higher

living wage, and higher productivity ...to continue selling ever more, not just here but around the world... To recover our natural and historic role as an enterprising, outward-looking and truly global Britain' (Johnson, 2019).

With numerous matters impinging on ESOL, it is precariously positioned somewhere between government strategies which seek to control matters such as funding, eligibility and outcomes and those which seek to expand such as contributing to the national economy and society. As government priorities focus on specific targets, specific funding comes into play which can straitjacket ESOL to policy focus. Teachers are limited to working with topics, texts and tasks which match the priority of the day. As an example, the SfL reference file, which provides a series of learner materials from E1 onwards, culminates at L2 with 'Unit 3: Working with others' (DfES, 2003a, pp.1-24).

This unit is contextualised in a bakery and is based on problem-solving in the workplace. It includes listening and speaking skills to:

- Follow and participate in discussions at work
- Clarify and summarise problems
- Follow and give explanations, instructions and accounts
- Criticise constructively, responds to criticism and complaints

The reading and writing skills include:

- Read and write memos, letters and emails
- Look for information in official documents and other texts
- Write guidelines in a work context

Project work activities are provided to extend learning. The two project tasks are to find and summarise a local or national newspaper article about a workplace problem, or to research and report back on how to claim sick pay.

Here economic policy drivers to help people get ready for work encourage the stereotyping of language as a functional tool for employment and ESOL professionals with a functional skills remit. However, each priority of the day has a particular take on what teachers are asked to do: Life in the UK encourages a focus on settling down in the community; fighting terrorism encourages a focus on

isolated Muslim women and British Values; and employability focuses on job vacancies, application forms, CVs, interview skills and customer service. Teachers are being guided as to what content should be covered in an ESOL classroom leaving individual professionalism under-rated and unacknowledged. Learners are finding content restricted to the needs of policy and their personal choice disregarded. The precarious position is that the ESOL field is continually having to bend and sway in the face of ever-changing policy directions.

The situation is complicated by the parcelling out of policy-making and implementation across numerous and shifting government departments. This places competing demands in an uneasy balance and ESOL, which has never been fully secure, remains unstable in light of contradictory policies.

Such contradictions encapsulate the tensions characteristic in government ESOL strategy. Firstly, for example, immigration legislation seeks to limit the numbers of foreign people entering and settling in the UK which contrasts with a requirement for many of the same people to fulfil work roles to support the British economy. Secondly, the overall funding reduction for ESOL provision undermines possibilities for immigrants to develop the language skills necessary to join the workforce and contribute to the UK economy. In addition, this also limits ability to integrate in wider UK society. Further, the current labelling, first set out by the government in the 2011 'Prevent' strategy, of the five values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs or without faith as 'British Values', rather than as common human values, can undermine the acceptance and welcoming of multiculturalism, setting up an 'us-and-them' perspective which is detrimental to a cohesive society. The government is then faced with the challenge of appearing to be simultaneously tough on immigration by decrying immigrants as impediments to a stable economy and strong communities whilst welcoming them to the labour market on the other.

The longevity of this inconsistent situation is captured by Hamilton and Hillier's 2009 article, '*ESOL Policy and Change*'. Although their work could be seen as dated, they signpost a series of issues in ESOL which continually reappear in discussions related to what constitutes good quality ESOL teaching and learning, including current policy concerns related to immigration, work and integration. The

article also refers to the limits ESOL practitioners and learners have to influence policy and pedagogy. These are contemporary issues for this project.

Hamilton and Hillier (ibid) recognise the chronology of ESOL and how inconsistencies in funding have been mainly linked to government responses to education-for-work needs, and an increasing number of immigrants. This has created a trend towards tightening the ESOL curriculum, and a move away from earlier learner-centred approaches. This move emphasises the importance of language for work, with ESOL justifying itself as a tool to enhance future employment opportunities. This can be seen by the placing of ESOL within subject sector 14, Preparation for Life and Work, of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) qualification descriptions (2015). This view of ESOL has impacted on the groups who are able to access provision, with ESOL viewed as a means to assimilate immigrants into UK society, focusing on social cohesion strategies and outcomes.

These viewpoints underscore tensions and conflicts in debates over different ESOL pedagogies. These could include language learning as a cognitive process or for contextualised use, or through formal instruction or informal learning. Importantly for integrated circles it touches on language for accuracy or fluency and is linked to the type of ESOL teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) which should be evident in the classroom and how to incorporate oral as well as traditional literacy learning.

A further issue is how to best accommodate the diversity of ESOL learners. This is a perennial issue for every ESOL classroom given the range of languages and previous educational experiences of the learners. Learners' backgrounds, which can include traumatic life experiences affecting their ability to settle, raises the need to clarify the remit of ESOL teacher roles, which may not only be to provide formal language learning but also to provide pastoral care. The answers as to what constitutes better pedagogy in ESOL are as yet unresolved and classroom practices are usually left to individual teachers' discretion within local institutional protocols.

This links to voices in ESOL, and Hamilton and Hillier (ibid) acknowledge that ESOL has long been a marginalised area. The importance of voice, or more

precisely the lack of ESOL voice, is that the professional conversation of what constitutes good ESOL pedagogy has been closed down to a policy monologue. Only the voice that speaks of targets appears to be sanctioned; alternative views related to wider benefits of second language learning largely go unheard. This is important because the valuable resource present in teachers' knowledge and students' experience of the effective ESOL classroom is lost when it comes to developing local practice and shaping national policy. This situation is reminiscent of the gap between practice and policy decisions as identified by Frank Coffield *et al.* (2007). The lack of practitioner voice in policy means that an important feedback loop that could 'harness the knowledge, good will and energy of staff working in the sector' (*ibid.*, p.723) is missing.

Teachers and students can struggle to be heard over the national drive towards strategies aimed at evidencing exam success in order to promote economic and social gains. ESOL exams strip tasks back to those in which language sub-skills can be most easily mapped to, and measured against, a narrow assessment criteria. This approach ensures awarding organisations meet national guidelines and qualifications are eligible for public funding.

The matter of funding never seems to quite resolve the issues which teachers and learners raise. The decisions made regarding what, and who, are funded often result in temporary and patchy support which does not adequately meet ESOL needs for much longer-term assistance. This is recognised in the 2016 Casey Report's call for a more co-ordinated approach to provision. In the subsequent '*Integrated Communities Strategy*' green paper the government grants that 'some voices are too seldom heard' (2018, p.17), especially those at local levels with local knowledge and expertise, and proposes to draw upon the experiences of learners, practitioners, volunteers, refugee and community groups to review how ESOL is supported.

The Strategy's proposals for the future of ESOL are part of a wider series of propositions for social integration which include supporting new migrants and resident communities (*ibid.*, pp.20-25). Hamilton and Hillier (2009) note that ESOL owes its existence to responses to immigration, and that 'each new wave of immigration to the UK brings new challenges and importantly, new opportunities' (*ibid.*, p.18) to the field.

The issues raised by Hamilton and Hillier (ibid.) have a recurring influence on government policies which influence ESOL teaching and learning. Policy direction is symbolic of a growing official view of ESOL as a national means to develop economically active and socially integrated immigrants. They distort how ESOL also works at the personal level and make it difficult for other views to be acknowledged. This raises questions about power relationships and which voices are valid, especially if they are not speaking the authorised language. Of significance is recognising the power that different voices have to generate meaningful conversation. For the current circle's project, classroom conversations are a way to bring learning closer to the individual, where learning can be life-enhancing as well as in fulfilment of national policy and funding directives.

The power play of voice in ESOL education remains a contemporary issue. A more recent indication of this was seen in the 2011 *Action for ESOL* campaign that was mounted in response to the 2010 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills strategy document for FE, '*Investing in Skills for Sustainable Growth*', which announced planned cuts to publicly-funded language provision.

The *Action for ESOL* campaign against this involved the combined efforts of teachers, interested groups such as the Refugee Council, Migrants Right Network and NIACE, and the active involvement of students directly affected by the proposals. This bid to protect language education provision also contributed to the debate around 'teacher professionalism, pedagogy and politics' encapsulated in the campaign's *ESOL Manifesto* (Peutrell, 2015, pp.139-154).

The manifesto included three key themes. Firstly, language education policy is seen to be influenced by immigration policy and the related view of English language being a prerequisite for social integration and cohesion, which undermines the value of cultural diversity.

Secondly, ESOL provision is recognised as being restricted by its marginal status in FE and by being isolated from other mainstream, vocational and academic courses which hinders progression opportunities for ESOL learners. ESOL SfL pedagogy is tied to a centralized curriculum with 'one-size-fits-all' skills-based outcomes, rather than directed to individual needs and abilities.

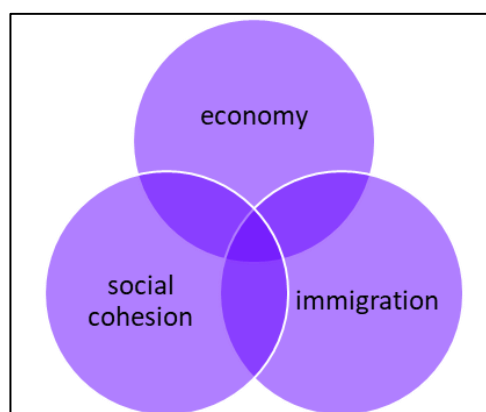
Thirdly, it recognises that ESOL teachers have a professional role to play in the social, cultural and political aspects which impact on the classroom, as well as working in the classroom itself. The responsibility to participate in the debates that affect ESOL teaching and learning is put forward as a professional duty.

Peutrell's (ibid.) examination not only reaches back to themes raised by Hamilton and Hillier (2009) but also connects to issues for this thesis. This highlights the historical, ongoing and current nature of debates around what ESOL is and should be, and who is authorised to express the nature and intent of ESOL.

The campaign secured fee remission for students not in receipt of an 'active benefit' like Jobseeker's Allowance or the work-related Employment Support Allowance. This outcome shows there may be a place where practitioners and participants can exercise collective power to inform policy and local developments to place the needs of students at the forefront. There are encouraging signs that attitudes towards teaching and students' needs are changing with Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (2019). The focus of Ofsted inspections is moving away from leadership and management, data and outputs towards a curriculum-centred view of the whole learner and learning experience.

In the meantime, ESOL learners and teachers lack a consistent national ESOL policy and are left subject to the way in which the government of the day frames ESOL in reaction to changing policy focus, competing government departments and fluctuating public attitudes towards immigration. There are powerful political challenges for ESOL in the current climate of Brexit, anti-terrorism strategies, the emphasis of employability and increasing focus on local planning and delivery. In the classroom, this inconsistency is felt most keenly by teachers and students in the tension between ESOL as a long-term, ongoing teaching and learning activity supporting language development to enable better life chances and choices, whilst serving a serious social function by providing an accepting, welcoming space where students can start to build confidence, wider friendships and independence in their community, and the way in which this pushes up against a growing trend to pigeonhole learning into short-term, uniform and predicted outcomes.

The diagram below summarises in visual form the web of overlapping national issues which impact on ESOL:



1.1 National issues

Summary

In effect, the history of ESOL in the UK has been one born of colonialism and the role of English as a dominant world language. A picture is emerging where English language is seen as a source of power, at least stemming from the time of the British Empire, when the British used their education system to encourage the acquisition of the English language and to ensure that command of the English language was the key to the future successes of those living in colonised countries. Thus, when colonies started to gain independence, after World War II, the English language maintained its authority by being chosen as the official or national language by the new leaders who had been educated with a British world view (Crystal, 2012).

The demand for the English language has been on an inexorable rise, pushed on by the growing global dominance of American culture, politics and economics since 1945 (ibid.), and continues to be important for achieving life chances, such as securing work opportunities, as well as to help immigrants integrate into and contribute to British society. Perhaps due to the historical role of ESOL in colonial education to engender a British outlook, it is often seen more as a way to secure assimilation in British trade systems and UK society - as a business need, rather than an educational need.

Local teaching and learning aims, and student needs, often come up against the economic pressures which exist in the business of education. Opportunities for

learners to become economically productive and socially active are hampered both by overall reduced funding for provision generally and for targeted groups of learners. There are added demands of chasing targets to meet narrowly-defined measures of success which feed into institutions' business management information returns, which in turn equate to funding. ESOL can easily find itself in a vicious circle, revolving around the recurring themes of immigration, economic productivity and social cohesion. The challenge has been set for teachers and learners to negotiate these three policy elements.

A description of how policy has impacted the local context within which this study is based now follows. It also includes examples of where collective teacher voice has been used to effect changes to local curriculum delivery proposals, closing the gap between policy and practice in this example of ESOL in FE.

Part 2: The local context

Introduction

Against a backdrop of intertwined and evolving historical migration patterns, funding arrangements and shifting policy focus on social cohesion and employment skills, one large general FE college in the north of England offers ESOL provision. There were approximately 26,000 students enrolled across its centres in three regional areas at the time of this project. Around half of those learning with the group are adult, a third are apprentices and a fifth are on the 16 to 19 study programme. The college also offers full-time provision for 14 to 16-year-olds.

The majority of learners are local residents, living in one of the top ten most deprived local authority districts in England, under the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, 2015). Around three quarters of learners aged 16 to 19 enrol at the college without a GCSE grade 4/C or above in English or mathematics.

The main site is set in a remote location, which is not on the direct route to any other main UK destination, meaning only those with specific reasons to visit go to the area or invest there. As a result, it has been challenging to maintain the local

economy in the modern world of ever-increasing transportation and communication links.

It has seen its traditional work routes in fishing and manufacturing industries decline, and in response the college works with a range of partners, stakeholders and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to ensure college provision is responsive to current local and regional priorities. For example, LEP priorities in engineering and construction have developed into course options for welding. There are also workshops and commercial hairdressing, beauty and catering outlets to prepare learners for work.

Preparing for work is the central focus of the college's provision. Almost all learners on the 16 to 19 study programme take part in external work placements, and those aged 14 to 16 participate in work experience, to develop skills for vocational studies. Study programmes cover a wide range of subject areas such as health, public services and care, engineering, arts and media and publishing. The 14-16 curriculum meets the statutory Key Stage 4 requirements with individualised learning programmes to study a combination of core subjects and vocational options.

Apprentices work across nine main subject areas specialising in engineering, building and construction, retail and commercial enterprise, business administration and customer services, health and social care, information and communication technology, sport, leisure and recreation, creative media and design and direct learning support. The proportion of apprenticeships is set to grow to meet the future employment and training needs of local and regional employers in areas such as logistics and energy technologies.

Adult learners are enrolled on a wide range of courses, at a variety of levels, and mostly study part-time. Some students are on access to higher education courses, some are focused on achieving GCSE mathematics and English and a large number are on employability courses. The latter includes ESOL students mandated by JobCentre Plus to attend short employability courses, but the majority of ESOL learners at the college enrol on a general 35-week SfL course.

The Public Sector Equality Duty Report (2016/17) detailed significant ESOL learner groups from Africa, the Middle and Far East, Central America and Eastern and Western Europe at the college. The 'White - any other white background' group is the largest of all the minority groups recorded at 8% of the student population as a whole, and can most likely be attributed to migration from the EU.

ESOL students can enrol at all college sites. One mainly caters for East European migrants seeking work in the local agricultural and horticultural labour market, the second (disaggregated on 31 July 2019) offers classes in preparation for the area's farming, care, hospitality and construction industries and the main campus supports the largest cohort, of approximately 600 students, to promote employment with the main local employers such as Siemens, Arco, HICA and P&O Ferries. Other possible outcomes are progress within the college to vocational courses or Higher Education, but the majority of the adult learners stay within ESOL to continue to the next level. The Report underlines the dual issues facing ESOL tutors with the message that the college is committed to meeting local labour market and individual learner needs in tandem.

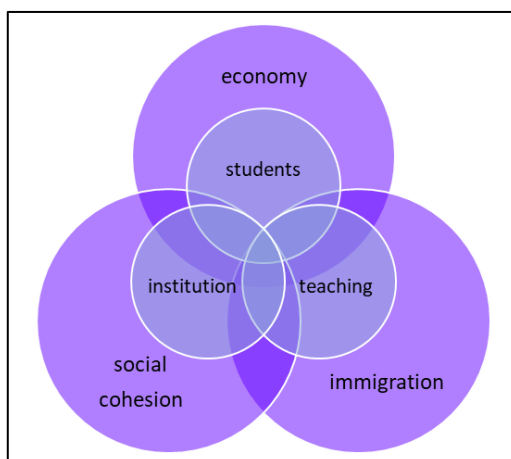
Focusing on ESOL provision at the main campus, the commitment is reflected in the ESOL department's efforts to offer suitable provision for local adult learners, continually adapting to national demands such as embedding citizenship, equality and diversity and Prevent / British Values in schemes of work, organising annual international food festivals and celebration of achievement events, taking forward the 2011 Sharp Report '*Colleges in their Communities*' by building local partnerships, responding to the ESOL Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and moving to Pro Solution electronic record keeping in 2018. It has also had to take the immediate college situation into account, most notably with loss of staff and class timetabling following a series of cost saving exercises.

In 2016, the Skills Funding Agency confirmed the college had a £10 million deficit and in August 2017 it began operating under a 'fresh start' arrangement for the financial recovery needed to continue to offer the qualifications required by the local job market. Part of the arrangement included a strategic review to continue to offer provision at all of the three college sites. This included the loss of 231 full time equivalent posts and a greater use of part-time hourly paid staff for course delivery.

In this situation, the ESOL curriculum is being squeezed ever-narrower to focus on exam achievement, retention and success rates. The external awarding body's assessment criteria is becoming a central focus of lessons and the time available for planning and developing is being swallowed by the demands of reporting and evidencing the required statistics and returns. In this sense, ESOL tutors are facing a situation very similar to that under the SfL policy as they continue to juggle the conflicting demands between the learning aims of their students and the demands of business management.

If ESOL policy has been a political response to three key issues which are a desire to appear tough on immigration to certain parts of the electorate, the need for a labour supply to support UK business and trade and a way to assimilate immigrants in UK society, then the learners are tied in the knotty issue at the centre of trying to access adequate funding for appropriate provision. If this were made available, it could go some way to supporting educational aims which would fulfil at least some of the aspects of these issues, for the state as well as for individual students.

The diagram below visually summarises the web of competing issues at national and local levels which impact on ESOL:



1.2 National and local issues

ESOL and the local context

The local context grounds the general discussion of contemporary ESOL policy and practice in this chapter. To begin, policy and funding are two sides of the same coin. The theme of policy being used to drive ESOL education as a tool for

employment is felt at the college in question by the increase of provision over recent years to prepare students for work. Previously, from 2002 - 05, the college provided ESOL under New Deal arrangements. These classes were part of an on-going programme of study of 30 hours a week. Students who left the classes to begin employment counted towards college successes. When New Deal provision was suspended by the college, it was due to the heavy need for teacher hours and the negative impact poor attendance had on retention rates.

ESOL for Work returned to the college in 2010/11 with Employability courses delivered for JobCentre Plus (JCP) claimants. Originally these courses were staffed by main ESOL lecturers as part of their general teaching timetable. In 2014/15, ESOL Employability moved to the college's Training division. The classes are now held in a dedicated site by ESOL teachers employed as trainers. Students attend for 12 hours a week for 10 weeks, and students who leave early to begin employment count negatively towards retention.

Main-campus students, who initially enrol on a general 35-week ESOL SfL course, can find themselves mandated to attend the short Employability courses. They are required to withdraw from the longer-term provision with immediate effect, or risk losing benefit entitlements. This naturally reduces numbers in the main-site classrooms. However, learner spaces can be filled by inviting students from the waiting list. The college offers a rolling programme so students can enrol throughout the year. This is made possible as demand continues to outstrip the supply of language classes and is indicative of the theme of provision.

Whilst the ESOL department makes every effort to place students in suitable classes as soon as possible, the number of spaces is limited by staffing levels, room availability and capacity and funding calculations. This creates a situation where it is not uncommon for students to be waiting over a year for a place at college. One response has been to open up classes which run from January to the end of the academic year, with potential exam modes restricted to reading only. The theme of curriculum-narrowing is evident here as late enrolment limits options available to students. The teaching and learning that takes place is necessarily restricted due to reduced time.

Policy priority is another issue that narrows curriculum, particularly when ESOL is taken as a social rather than an educational issue. An example of impact on curriculum is the use of ESOL to foster integration. The view that ESOL can promote social cohesion is evident with the requirement from 2017/18 to embed British Values in ESOL schemes of work and tutors are required to undertake Prevent training. These strategies are promoted with posters displayed in public areas around the college. In combination, the focus of British Values and Prevent recalls Hamilton and Hillier's (2009) point about the wider role of teachers beyond language instruction. In this case, whether they should be co-opted into being the eyes, ears and enforcers of national security policies.



1.3 Examples of college displays 17/18

Work in the classroom is a matter of individual, professional choice, but within the confines of the ESOL schemes of work for each ESOL level. These specify when and which language content, in contextualised topics, should be covered over the academic year. The schemes were written to meet the AECC and based on the 'Headway' ESOL course books published by Oxford University Press.

The schemes have grown over recent years as separate national policy priorities have come to the fore at separate times. These have been translated into key themed events for equality and diversity, employability, Prevent and British Values, and have been bolted on to the main programme of teaching and learning, reducing time and space for the language focus of the curriculum. The language

points and key themes sometimes make awkward bedfellows when there is little natural relation between the two. Examples in the 18/19 E3 ESOL scheme of work coupled the language-focused topic of housing with Alcohol Awareness and Obesity Awareness. Sun, Deaf and Mental Health Awareness Week and International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia coincided with the final speaking and listening exam week. It was unclear how classes could do justice to four key themes in one week when the students, the majority of whom only attended once a week, took exams.

ESOL curriculum is narrowed in response to each wave of national policy priorities which erodes time available on schemes of work for content specifically about language learning. This also undermines the teacher's capacity to meet their ESOL learners' needs.

Teachers need to be pragmatic to balance competing demands and often end up developing ESOL as a pedagogy in the narrow spaces between policy pressures and curriculum. The institution's schemes of work sit with blank lesson plan templates, a recommended text book and banks of course materials to be adapted, supplemented or replaced as teachers feel best meet their own student group needs in relation to the specified content. This work tends to happen quietly and independently with little or no feedback to colleagues or managers. Platforms to share practice or to influence curriculum are limited which brings in the theme of voice and who the authorised representatives are.

The ESOL department has been plagued over recent years with questions over end of year exams and success rates. ESOL TLA is mapped to awarding organisations' assessment criteria and there is an increasing trend towards controlled task-based assessments in a bid to raise achievement.

The college's previous awarding body, University of Cambridge, which had developed Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)-accredited tests, assessed results by overall performance. For reading (E1-3 only; L1 and L2 took National Adult Literacy tests) scores were awarded for text, sentence and word focus; writing exams (for all ESOL levels) also focused on text, sentence and word skills; speaking and listening exams assessed ability to speak to communicate, listen and respond and engage in discussion. Students took final end of year

exams in June and could either 'pass' or be 'below pass'. Any resits took place the following February, splitting results across two academic years. February passes did not count towards the results from the previous June.

When the QCA system was replaced by the QCF framework, the college moved to the English Speaking Board as the awarding organisation. ESOL exam grading became 'pass' or 'unsuccessful'. To pass a QCF-accredited exam, a student has to evidence their competence in all of the assessment criteria for the mode. It is no longer possible to pass any ESOL exam with a mean percentage. Exams were taken in May with resits in June to preserve results for one academic year.

However, the requirement to show 100% competence against the assessment criteria did not help to improve college pass rates. As a result, in 2018/19, college management required the department to become a recognised centre with Ascentis as its third ESOL awarding organisation in 4 years. Results are still based on 100% competency, plus a minimum percentage from the tasks completed, but the individual exam tasks, which make up the complete award, can be taken as and when students are 'ready', in place of a final end of year exam.

The official evidence of 'being ready' is data management. The road to exams is paved with diagnostic assessments and mocks. The issue is that as most students will only be able to enrol on a once a week class, as this is what is mainly offered, the time needed to complete a class-set of assessments and mocks stretches out. Time is needed not only because the structure of exam tasks require it, but also as many students will be absent for the scheduled assessment or mock weeks – this is the enduring nature of ESOL attendance patterns. Unfortunately, the requirements to assess, score, report results and record predicted outcomes are squeezing yet more time on the schemes of work.

Achievement targets have also led to a decrease in the number of non-accredited Pre-Entry options available for the lowest level of learners. Prior to 2012/13, Pre-Entry enrolments were unrestricted. Students beginning to learn English were not obliged to enter any of the three exam modes: reading, writing, and speaking and listening. Their achievements were based on RAPRA (Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement). This is a process which records and measures the progress and achievement of learners on non-accredited learning programmes.

In 2012/13, Pre-Entry enrolments were limited to a maximum of 20% of the total ESOL student body. Since 2016/17, students can only register for Pre-Entry if they have never sat an E1 mode before. If they have, the students are required to register for at least one E1 exam, regardless of their ability in that mode. This often means students are entered for exams they cannot yet pass due to spikey profiles in ability across the modes. There are no longer separate Pre-Entry classes for these learners. They are accommodated in E1.

There were 858 exam enrolments in 2017/18, compared to 14 Pre-Entry enrolments. The exam requirement has effectively removed a stepping stone towards accredited provision and progression through the levels to other learning for the lowest-level learners. This makes national plans to improve social mobility a more difficult challenge for them. At no point in this process of provision restriction were ESOL teaching staff or students asked for their views. It appears that opportunities to voice concerns and suggestions are lost to business pressures on the institution, like others in this current climate, to offer only the type of provision which contributes to financial management. Amendments to provision are usually announced as a 'fait accompli' with those directly affected having to adapt after the fact.

A move by the interim ESOL management team, following the college's financial 'fresh start', offered a way to address the issue of inappropriate exam entries for students not yet at assessment level, by returning to the non-accredited RARPA system. This was aimed at all Entry level students. A pilot was proposed for students commencing studies in January 2019, with plans to fully implement this option for 2019/20 enrolments. However, this would have swung the pendulum in the opposite direction as students would have been excluded from external accreditation until they reached L1.

The arguments put forward for this system were that firstly, with an imminent Ofsted inspection, the ongoing issue of declining success rates meant that it would have been impossible to continue with the 'exam entry for all' policy, as it would likely have resulted in a poor judgement. Secondly, other regional providers offer RARPA-only courses with higher success rates. Thirdly, entry level qualifications, as stepping stone qualifications, are not valued or recognised by employers.

The initial reasoning was based on the anticipated political and economic consequences of an unfavourable Ofsted inspection report, which might have encouraged students to enrol at other providers, resulting in a loss of revenue. This type of reasoning holds sway in the conversations that take place in planning meetings with senior management, but it does not include the voice of teachers or learners. The blanket approach to remove accredited option for all entry level students not only overlooked the fact that some learners are well equipped to pass exams but also negates the value of the awards to students as evidence of their progress and success.

The ESOL department has a dedicated team of staff committed to supporting its learners achieve as best as they can, and is forced to speak up determinedly in order to be heard. There is the possibility to influence issues when they are raised collectively to represent the best interests of teaching and learning. Concerns raised by teachers regarding the RARPA plan led management to recognise that some entry level learners will wish to gain qualifications and that tutors are best placed to judge learners' preparedness and place them on a suitable accredited option. This is especially the case as learners may seek alternative colleges to access accredited courses if the opportunity is removed from the institution. RARPA can now be used a 'bridge' for learners moving towards qualifications and progressing up the ESOL levels.

The restructuring of the college under the 'fresh start' arrangements included consultation over appropriate staffing levels to meet ESOL needs. Decisions to reduce previously agreed 2018/19 staff numbers from 8.9 to 5.7 full time equivalent posts were taken by managers outside of the day-to-day running of the department, but experienced in planning budgets. It took a concerted and sustained effort by all ESOL team members to query how the reduced figures had been calculated before a slightly more realistic figure was reached.

The significant factor in both cases is the absence of consultation with tutors prior to operational decisions being announced, which overlooks the bank of professional knowledge and seasoned understanding of what relevant provision looks like to learners. Practical experience is side-lined by financial practicalities. This is symptomatic of the conditions where authorised, management voices

responding to policy pressures hold sway over ESOL to narrow down options for inclusive pedagogies such as circles in the local context.

Within this context, the potential use of circles as an integrated skills intervention for ESOL learners will be bound by what is possible under current financial and strategic arrangements at the national level and in the local situation. These limit the numbers of teachers and classes permissible, which limit the number of students able to access provision at the college, therefore limiting who the project can reach. National and local policies also impact on what teachers are expected to do, with particular attention paid to ESOL as a means to support the economy and social cohesion. In this light, ESOL pedagogy is seen as an instrument for social policy and change.

However, what circles can attempt to do is to also reflect on ESOL pedagogy as an educational process. It can look at how circles might be useful in the classroom encouraging a student-centred approach by enabling individuals to actively participate in their learning in collaborative ways. In addition, it can consider how the method provides learners with a voice. This hinges on how learners can participate in the debate around ESOL, despite their experience of it as a narrow and restricted system. It might be possible to influence such things as future timetabling, content, materials, classroom activities and assessment strategies, for example.

Hamilton and Hillier's (2009) conclusion includes a message about the importance of not forgetting the legacy of TLA techniques, usually developed at the local grassroots level, which can be lost as practitioners find themselves responding to latest government policies. Circles may be able to support national and institutional goals, but the learner experience, the personal struggles and successes of learning another language via an integrated circle, will be the main focus of this investigation. Student consultation, interviews, surveys, observations and a circle trial, with assessments both pre and post intervention, will aim to shed light on the effects of circle pedagogy.

Developing pedagogy in the ESOL classroom

The nationalities that make-up ESOL classrooms reflect the changing pattern of international conflicts and economic situations which drive the waves of

immigration and the UK's policy response to them. The classroom is where the learners see their individual interests being noticeably served. This is where they are actively working towards achieving their personal aspirations in their new lives. The use of the circle TLA method at the college that is being investigated could be an approach to meet their needs whilst providing a way to respond to conflicting issues and competing demands, thereby making the best of the situation for students, tutors and management.

The objective is to base circles on previously established pedagogy for structured and collaborative reading and writing, incorporating a democratic participatory approach. The aim is to raise language achievement both at a personal level and for the required measurements of success, as a progression route to future education or employment opportunities and also for the skills needed to enhance wider community participation. In this way it may be possible for circles to contribute to the development of skills needed for education, the economy and for social integration.

This particular TLA method will consider how conversation might build reading circles and support task completion in writing circles. This approach integrates reading, writing and speaking and listening to encourage integrated language learning to build learners' self-confidence and autonomy for their own needs. For some students this is basic day-to-day community activities like talking to a neighbour or shopping. For others it is helping children with school work and being able to understand teachers and school letters. For another group it might be to improve work prospects and a different group may have plans to go on to other courses or higher education. For some students the need to learn English could be any combination of the preceding personal aims. Many attend ESOL for the pleasure of acquiring new language skills or developing existing knowledge, or for social contact outside the home, rather than defined educational or employment aims.

The circle method could also contribute to addressing national priorities by informally responding to formal policies. The area of immigration is reflected in the circle dynamic which uses group work to build classroom communities to help people feel at home; the economy and helping people get ready for work can be seen in the way circles rests on team work which requires each participant to use

their own initiative to complete their individual role and fulfil a responsibility to the whole group, timekeeping and working to deadlines; integration and helping the learners get along in their community by exploring differing views and cultural outlooks and responding to these in a diplomatic and democratic way; education and preparing for exams through the mapping of language skills to the awarding organisation's assessment criteria which is based on the bedrock of the AECC. Thus, circles may be able to negotiate some of what is policy in ESOL and points to accuracy, but there could be potential to extend the curriculum towards fluency by including a wider range of topics, texts and tasks for students living real, whole lives with interests beyond the constraints of SfL.

The project as a whole aims to develop a new integrated circles pedagogy and to critically evaluate its potential impact on classroom experience and help to address the challenges that often-changing policy priorities bring to the ESOL classroom.

Part 3: An overview of local action research

Reading and Writing Circles

The process of investigating the circles approach as a TLA intervention for ESOL learners at the college developed out of Angie Simms experiences reported in the Autumn 2010 edition of NATECLA News. This provided an insight into the structure of a reading circle and was supplemented by Marina McGovern's follow-up article in Summer 2011.

At the time, L1 and L2 ESOL students at the college struggled to achieve in final exams, particularly in the reading mode. The L2 reading exam pass rate was 57% in 2011. This gave me scope to implement an extra-curricular reading circle in 2011/12 to support L1 students better access texts through the use of structured reading.

Progress towards becoming fully functional in English and eligible for GCSE courses and/or other progression routes was limited. Most of the college's ESOL students were not able to succeed at GCSE C grade and this was a barrier to Higher Education and employment. Whilst the college provided a workshop for ESOL students to access academic support for those studying a GCSE course,

there was no general assistance available for other ESOL students. Therefore, the aim of the reading circle was to enhance support provision to help develop autonomous and fluent reading, awareness of cultural references, study and social skills, progression through the levels and exam pass rates.

Tutors were asked to identify and encourage students thought to be in most need of additional reading support to participate, as evidenced from assessment results. However, participation was voluntary and in the event students with a personal interest in developing their reading self-referred themselves to the group.

The sessions were based on Mark Furr's (2009) model and companion collection of stories (Furr, 2007) for reading circles. The circle lasted for 6 weeks and separated reading into six distinct roles. The participants read a different text each week and each student took an individual reading role. Students rotated the roles to have an opportunity to experience each one; a different role for each text.

The roles were:

Discussion Leader – read to prepare general questions about the text and facilitated the group discussion.

Summariser – read for the main events and summarized the story.

Connector – looked for links with daily life.

Word Master – found new, difficult or interesting vocabulary.

Passage Person – looked for important paragraphs.

Culture Collector – looked for cultural similarities or differences.

The tutor acted as the facilitator only. It was the students who guided and led the discussions; raising thoughts, reflections and opinions on the text and connections to the outside world.

Feedback from those who participated was positive but this initial trial was limited by the fact that it was scheduled to take place in lunchtime and held in the small group study room in the library. This meant that most students were excluded from participating either because the time was unsuitable or because there was not enough physical space to accommodate them. In addition, there was the ongoing issue with exam pass rates such as the 2012 L2 ESOL SfL reading exam results at 38%. This led to the first action research project with the Learning and Skills

Council (LSIS) and the University of Sunderland Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training (SUNCETT) in 2012/13.

This project sought to formally consider the reading circle model as an effective and efficient TLA approach for ESOL learners specifically at this college. The two main questions considered were:

- What support do students need to develop a reading habit and reading skills?
- Do reading circles provide the support needed?

The project commenced with three separate focus sessions with a total of 22 students to record student voice on existing reading habits, support needed to increase or improve reading and self-perception of reading ability. The students identified 5 main barriers:

1. lack of time to read
2. difficulty identifying texts at appropriate levels
3. not finding interesting texts
4. not knowing the assessed exam skills they need
5. requiring reading support

Due to timetabling issues it was then only possible to continue the research with one group to investigate if a reading circle could help overcome the barriers. Fourteen students were introduced to the idea of reading circles and nine completed the project.

I mapped the roles to the University of Cambridge final exam criteria to make the exam skills explicit. To see if the reading circle had any effect on skills development, the participants took an initial assessment at the start of the project. The average result was 44.6%.

The reading circle continued to follow Furr's (ibid) model, with the addition of a weekly reading diary. This gave the participants a chance to make notes about their experience of reading the circle texts and any other reading over the weeks. It allowed them to reflect on and assess their own reading progress and make their own plans for reading more and developing skills. For the tutor, it showed who was reading, what they were (and weren't) reading and to use the self-assessed reading strengths and weaknesses to inform future lesson planning.

At the end of the six weeks the participants took another assessment. The average overall score in this exam was 77.5%, an increase of 32.9%.

Initial thoughts were that the reading circle helped to bring about an improvement as it addressed each of the barriers. The reading circle model gave a set time each week for reading. Further, it encouraged wider reading. Prior to the reading circle the majority of reading (86%) was non-fiction. The diaries showed that the nine students read a combined total of 145 texts over the 6 reading circle weeks, with a more even balance between texts related to work, education, home/social life (58%) and fiction (42%).

The circle texts (Furr, 2007) provided a careful selection for different levels, which enabled students to make steady progress and assess their own achievement. The collection used a variety of stories which students found interesting and enjoyable so they were keen to join in. This was shown with a 93% reading circle task completion rate.

The reading circle helped students develop their skills through on-going learning. The roles raised awareness of approaches to reading at text, word, sentence and cultural levels. Self-awareness and self-confidence in reading skills increased across all the standards tested in the ESOL SfL exams.

The discussion element supported students through the sharing of knowledge and ideas and was linked to skills development such as clarifying meanings of whole text and specific vocabulary; developing summary skills and pronunciation. However, most importantly, discussion was the means of widening cultural perspectives. The sharing of personal experiences in a safe and supportive group was crucial. The reading circle model worked on encouraging students to '*Read, think, connect, ask... and connect*' (Furr, 2009, p.10). It seemed that it was connections and conversations which lead to language learning alongside learning about other lives through self-reflection, peer evaluation and questioning.

The reading circle appeared to be encouraging reading with speaking and listening skills and also writing, for example with the role sheets, diaries and extension tasks. However, more work was needed to investigate if the effects could be sustained and replicated in other language modes. Therefore I undertook a second action research project in 2016/17 with the Education and Training

Foundation (ETF) and SUNCETT to extend the previous reading circle research into the use of writing circles to offer support for E3 students.

The research used similar methods starting with four separate focus sessions with a total of 63 students to record student voice on existing writing habits, support needed to increase or improve writing and self-perception of writing ability. The students identified 5 main barriers, virtually mirroring reading circles:

1. lack of time to write
2. not understanding tasks
3. not understanding mistakes
4. not knowing exam standards they need
5. solitary writing

All of the 63 students were introduced to the idea of writing circles and 44 completed the project. The sessions were based on the reading circle model of six rotating roles, adapted to take Sylvia Gunnery's (2007) work on writing circles into account.

Again, I mapped the roles to the final exam criteria to make the ESB exam skills explicit. The writing circle roles were:

Discussion Leader – read to prepare general questions about the task and facilitated the group discussion

Summariser – read for the key points needed to plan the task.

Passage Person – considered the topics and order of paragraphs.

Connector – chose appropriate linking words for paragraphs.

Word Master – chose key vocabulary to complete the task.

Punctuation Marker – considered essential punctuation for the task.

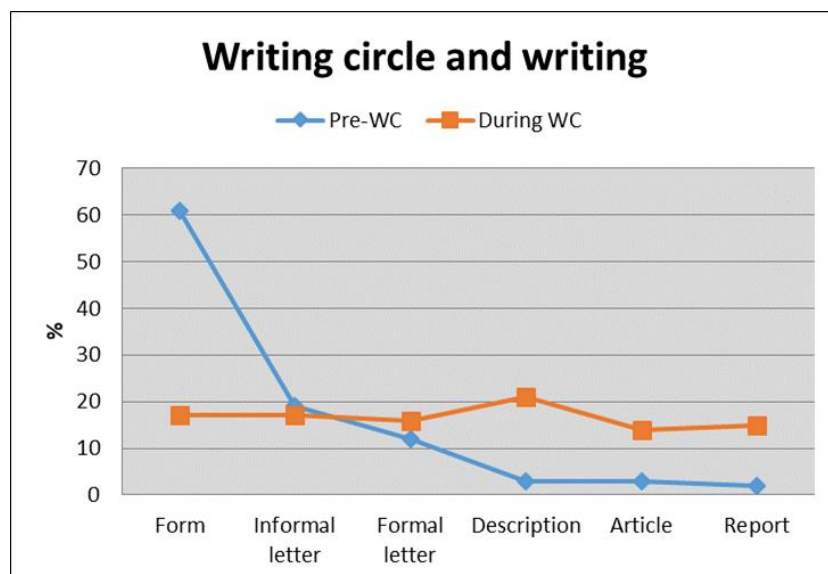
Each week, the students read an exemplar from one of the 6 different text types that could appear in their final exam, and then worked together to plan an appropriate answer for an associated written task. The final draft was written individually.

The outcomes included an increase in assessment results. The average initial assessment score of 27% increased to 48% for the formative assessment.



1.4 A writing circle in action

Students were able to practise a broader range of writing over the 6 writing circle weeks, expanding opportunities to try different types of writing and 92% of writing circle activities were completed. Self-awareness and confidence improved as the writing circle encouraged a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of text, word and sentence levels. Self-confidence increased for six of the eight exam standards and students were aware of a need of development in the two others. The weekly discussions built supportive relationships in class to assist with different text type layouts and language, and also to share personal knowledge of the contexts or scenarios given for writing tasks. Key improvements included planning, paragraphing, connectives and grammar skills and a re-balancing of the type of texts written:



1.5 Writing circle and changes to types of writing

Both Furr (2009) and Gunnery (2007) acknowledge the work of Harvey Daniels (2002) in the development of their approaches. Daniels (ibid.) took the idea of combining collaborative learning and independent reading, and integrating them into an open-ended classroom activity based on books, with participants taking on specific reading roles.

The use of roles is central to Daniels (ibid), Furr (ibid) and Gunnery (ibid). This aspect of circles gives participants a clear purpose for reading or writing, gives practise using different sub-skills, generates different perspectives and prompts personal connections to texts and tasks. When the students join together in their circle to share their roles, they are able to build up their understanding of a reading text or writing task as a whole. This links the method to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978) where problems, which cannot be resolved independently, are dealt with collaboratively.

The results and support materials of both the reading circle and writing circle projects have been shared with the college's ESOL department in team training events and with wider colleagues through the ESOL Moodle page and college wide CPD Moodle page, school and cross-college newsletters. The project also led the Curriculum Librarian to re-organise readers in the library by levels, so they can be self-accessed by students. ESOL schemes of work were amended to include reading circles as a permanent option for E3 – L2 ESOL courses. The final project posters were displayed to share research findings at the LSIS and ETF Research Conferences in London in June 2013 and July 2017 respectively.

However, the projects also indicated where more consideration was required, leaving a series of points to reflect on for this current investigation. Firstly, sufficient time is needed to implement circles where the concept and the execution of the specific roles are new forms of TLA. This current project will look at introducing roles in whole class activities before introducing individual roles in circles.

I will help make the method more accessible to participants by starting with the most familiar texts and tasks, such as completing forms with personal information. It is an added burden for learners to try to come to terms with a new genre at the same time as emerging language skills and a new process.

It is important for the learners to know the assessment criteria from the outset and for it to be revisited in circle activities. This can scaffold self-evaluations about progress and the move towards more independent learning.

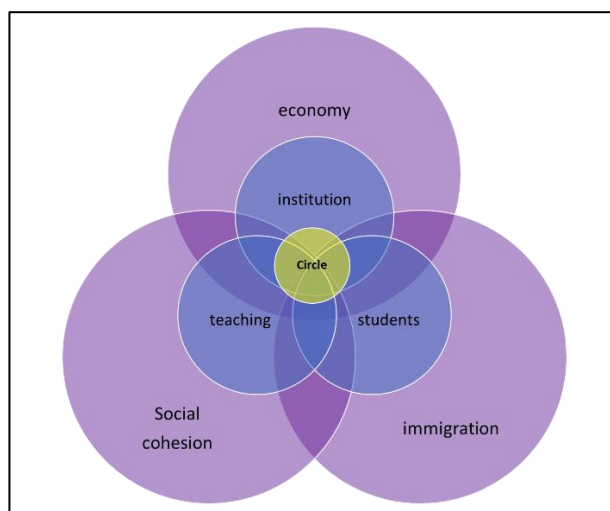
Circle activities worked best in past iterations with small groups and individual copies of texts which students could take ownership of with personal annotations. I will need to carefully select texts to initiate individual thinking for the group discussions which means looking beyond standard SfL non-fiction reading and writing materials.

Circles are long-term and ongoing activities. They cannot serve as quick fixes to accelerate language learning for successful exam results. They could, given the right circumstances, prompt a growing self-awareness of current and potential English ability and of differing points of view expressed in different texts and by group members.

Time spent discussing texts and tasks, integrated with independent reading and writing, seems to support the development of reading and writing skills. This has given rise to the current research focus on the role of conversation in circles.

This focus runs alongside the idea that circles may be a way to respond to the series of underlying issues being juggled at national and local levels: how national concerns with immigration, economy and social cohesion can be balanced against teaching aims for a curriculum to meet student needs in light of the business demands of the educational institution. This informs my question: How does an integrated circle pedagogy impact the classroom experience?

The following diagram summarises the position of the circles approach as a response to the competing issues at national and local levels which impact on ESOL:



1.6 Circle TLA method within overarching issues

Original contribution

Reflecting on the policy agenda and the limitations this places on the ESOL classroom, I recognise that a tension exists between the official rhetoric of what ESOL education is and what my teaching experience tells me it needs to be. My previous circle action research indicates a way to respond. I use the terms ‘accuracy’ and ‘fluency’ to summarise the situation where accuracy relates to controlled teaching and learning, and fluency indicates room for a more meaningful experience.

I contribute my description of my research of me as a reflexive teacher as I seek to address tensions with the integrated circles approach for a more rounded ESOL education, and my efforts to carefully capture experiences of accuracy and fluency in the process. I describe collaborative dialogic spaces within an adult, multilingual teaching and learning environment which draws on learners’ lived experiences to reach richer meanings and understandings for language learning and of existing with others in society.

The thesis continues with a consideration of circles as an integrated skills process. This entails a review of relevant literature. Firstly, I will consider a body of academic literature to provide a theoretical background. This enables thinking about different views of education and models of conversation in the classroom. Secondly, I will look at circles literature for how the method can feed into ESOL pedagogy. The literature will help to develop an understanding of the presence of language accuracy and language fluency in ESOL where the former attends to policy needs and the latter creates classroom spaces for learner autonomy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

From the discussion of the context and problem for this research project, certain key factors are emerging at national and local levels: how national concerns with immigration, economy and social cohesion shape and limit the ESOL curriculum. Against this I considered the teacher's aim to provide a curriculum to meet student needs while needing to contribute to the business demands of the educational institution.

The pilot reading and writing circle groups I set up were ostensibly to respond to immediate educational demands for increased exam passes, with the secondary benefit of improving student progression opportunities in the longer-term. The main contributing factor to improvements in reading and writing skills could be linked to the discussion element in circles - time spent sharing and talking about texts and tasks – ahead of independent reading and writing. This stimulated the research focus on the role of conversation in circles. Time spent reflecting on this has led me to think more carefully about the role of circle discussions. I have focused on how circle conversations are undertaken by students jointly and independently of the teacher. I have come to see the important role student autonomy plays in bringing a curriculum to life for the students.

In order to better investigate student autonomy and its appearance in circle activities, I have developed four questions to help focus my literature search and reading. These questions provide me with a gauge to help me evaluate my reading, and to ensure it is relevant and likely to contribute to the research project. Questions 1 and 2 help me to probe the literature on autonomy to identify key ideas and different educational approaches to autonomy. Questions 3 and 4 help me to think carefully about how the academic discussion on autonomy applies to the circles approaches considered. The questions are:

1. What is group and individual autonomy?
2. What conditions does the research suggest support student autonomy?
3. Where does the concept of learner autonomy fit with ESOL educational approaches?

4. Which circle features support the emergence of learner autonomy?

This literature review is in two parts. The first section considers academic literature and seeks to answer questions 1 and 2, to critically evaluate two different accounts of autonomy and what they suggest autonomy looks like from a general point of view. I also explore their suggestions about what conditions are likely to provide opportunities for autonomy to emerge in a classroom, which leads to a consideration of different models of conversation developing themes that assist with these questions.

The second part evaluates three existing circle teaching approaches. I present an overview of the different circle methods. I then propose a working model for an integrated process that combines key elements of the three approaches in order to relate theory to practical classroom activity. As part of this discussion I weave in a consideration of questions 3 and 4.

The overall aim of the literature review is to present a theoretical account of autonomy and then to explore how this account relates to the descriptions of circle teaching presented. The integrated circles approach, presented towards the end of this chapter, is developed in light of the preceding discussion. The integrated model aims to support student autonomy within the broader institutional context and its requirements. Evaluating the impact of the integrated circles approach is at the heart of this research project. A nuanced understanding of student autonomy will play an important part in this evaluative work. I now turn to the task of exploring different theoretical accounts of student autonomy.

Part 1: Academic Literature

Individual and group autonomy in the context of circle teaching

Enabling autonomy sounds a worthy goal. The notion itself is tricky and putting it into practice is equally challenging. In the discussion that follows I present two different approaches to the theoretical understanding of autonomy.

The first, psychological approach, puts forward an account of autonomy framed by the role of the teacher as the organiser who orchestrates teaching and learning to make student autonomy happen. By contrast, the second existential approach,

while acknowledging the teacher's role in establishing supportive conditions in the classroom, focuses on the riskiness of a communicative space and its potential. Comparing these two different accounts of autonomy will help me to generate a rich answer to my first question: what is group and individual autonomy?

My second question - what conditions does the research suggest support student autonomy? - draws attention to the issues the literature suggests the teacher is likely to encounter when she tries to make space for autonomy in the classroom. For example, the teacher knows more than the learners about her subject and how it can be taught. Students need to develop language competences; but adult students especially will have much life experience, some good and some troubling. They will have things on their minds and things they want to say. They could do well to talk about and explore these matters. The phrase 'learner autonomy' sits in the middle of these challenges pulling in different directions.

The two accounts of autonomy considered suggest a way to balance the competing needs to teach the right way to talk and the need to talk about what matters. The kind of balance suggested identifies conditions that need to be in place. It is when these conditions exist that a good balance is struck. The discussion of these two different theoretical accounts of autonomy will therefore also include a critical evaluation of the kind of balance they imply.

Applying a psychological account of autonomy to circles

The first psychological account of autonomy is exemplified in the work of Stefanou *et al.* (2004). They conclude that student autonomy can be supported in three ways: organisational autonomy, procedural autonomy and cognitive autonomy.

Organisational autonomy is perceived as actions taken by the teacher to 'offer students opportunities for choice over environmental procedures' (*ibid.*, p.101). The procedures include enabling students to participate in choosing group members, deciding assessment criteria, task deadlines and seating arrangements.

Procedural autonomy relates to students being able to choose the lesson materials, and how to present their completed work. It also allows for students to talk openly about their learning needs which the teacher should respond to accordingly.

Cognitive autonomy encourages students to freely discuss, question, debate and justify a range of issues and possible solutions together thereby drawing on individual and group critical thinking with guidance from a teacher. This is in order for students to 'be independent problem solvers with scaffolding' (ibid., p.101).

If the integrated circle can set up conditions for the development of autonomy, how do these three types of support appear in the model?

At first inspection, there appears to be little room for organisational autonomy in circles. The discussion groupings are decided by the teacher and the assessment criteria is provided by the awarding body. Students do move themselves into their groups, and choose where they sit within their circle, but this is usually to do with the available space in the room rather than a genuine freedom of choice over who they work with and how they sit together.

Procedural autonomy is constrained as the teacher chooses the lesson texts and the sequence of rotating roles. Circle writing tasks are matched to the exam writing tasks and these require certain layouts so there is no option for students to decide how to present their completed work. Even the discussion itself follows a set procedure of up to 6 individual students talking about one text from their role perspectives.

However, as the content of a circle conversation cannot be constrained by the procedure there is room here for students to exercise autonomy. They are free to introduce, pursue or drop topics as they choose. By listening carefully to the circle discussion, the teacher can identify areas where students are revealing their learning needs and respond accordingly. Further, as students become familiar with a responsive teacher, they may start to request specific activities or information to help them close their personal gaps (Clarke, 2001). Additionally, whilst writing rubrics limit what and how students are expected to produce, they are sufficiently loose to allow each student to write from their own experience within the given tasks.

Cognitive autonomy is more central to circles with the free discussion in which students share their individual findings and questions about texts, tasks and

connections that encourages the group to think about explanations and answers together and with the teacher: 'By manipulating ideas, negotiating meaning, and sharing expertise, students discover how to extend their budding knowledge' (ibid., p.107).

The view of autonomy put forward by Stefanou *et al.* (ibid.) is useful for distinguishing features of the situations that teachers might like to take into account for their classrooms when trying to make space for autonomy to flourish. There is a significant difficulty as supporting autonomy can be presented as something performed on students, with the teacher controlling organisational features of the class, leading procedures and guiding thinking in order to meet defined ends. The teacher as the professional expert has the overview of the language skills students need to meet the course requirements. This directs students to learn to reproduce what they need to be able to do by following the model provided by the teacher. However, this can lead to an overly technical approach to learning with the teacher holding the power as sole decision-maker in the classroom. The situation is summarised by Dunne (1993, pp.76-77):

the teacher's clear-cut goal in the behavioural objective model of teaching is a specific response – evidence in behaviour – in the pupils, he is the 'agent' of the transaction and the audience is the 'patient'.

The behaviourist line makes it harder to see opportunities for student agency because a teacher-as-expert learning situation does not invite students to participate in decision-making. Rather, it can be viewed as a training exercise where learning decisions are made for students. The behavioural model reduces chances for reciprocity and sets up more authoritarian teaching conditions.

Stefanou *et al.* (2004) caution against these conditions with the idea of 'supportive control'. They suggest supportive control makes 'seeking student's initiative' possible in which 'students can express their desires and become co-decision makers in the learning process' (ibid., p.100).

However, the striking feature of the phrase 'supportive control' is that in supporting student initiative and decision-making the teacher maintains control. It holds to the behaviourist theme by focusing on 'teacher behaviors' (ibid., p.101) to 'engineer'

(ibid., p.106) the classroom's organisational and procedural environment and cognitive activities.

Sharing learning activities can make education more meaningful to students and teachers. It has long been a requirement of teaching and learning observations for teachers to inform learners of the common learning goal(s) at the start of a lesson and to display the aims and objectives throughout the lesson. These spell out what the teacher has planned for the class, but Dewey (1916, cited in Biesta, 2014, pp.32-33) suggests that learning should accommodate more than specified targets to include a range of individual interests from within the group. ESOL students share the aim of English language development within their class but have many different personal reasons for doing so. If these interests and reasons are incorporated in the learning goals then those who 'take part have a stake in the activity' (ibid., p.34). Students and teachers are invested in the learning together. This can open ways for genuine participation in a responsive, rather than a pre-set, classroom which can stimulate reciprocity and set up more democratic teaching conditions.

Participation in a classroom like this requires communication. Biesta indicates this is essential for 'how education, roughly understood as the interaction between teachers and students is possible' (ibid., p.28). Communication is a way to involve students and teachers through making connections with others, sharing experience, and taking, reflecting on and transforming their own and others' actions and ideas in order to successfully co-operate together towards a shared understanding. This is a reciprocal, open process to take thinking forward in an unpredictable, creative manner (ibid., pp.29-41).

A useful summary of distinguishing features of supporting autonomy is found in Biesta's (ibid) comments on the types of communication that can take place in a classroom. Communication can be to transmit information. It can also be to make and share meanings (ibid., p.35). Therefore, it appears crucial to navigate between providing enough teacher guidance to allow for learning of key required information and enough space to allow for learner autonomy and personal growth without moving too far into either extreme. A route may exist in 'a process of communication' (ibid. p.32).

Integrated circles expect student voices to be central to circle discussions so that individual genuine issues to do with language learning or personal experience are examined with others in student-led classroom encounters, autonomously from teacher-directed work. This is the opposite of traditional ESOL classes where prescribed discussion topics are centred on work, training, education and social integration topics to rehearse basic language structures and key vocabulary with the teacher judging competence.

By welcoming student-led directions, teachers must accept the risk that their classrooms will result in unplanned learning and outcomes as learners freely use their developing language to choose their own conversation paths. This freedom is not about teacher-controlled models of student autonomy with teachers putting in 'supportive control' (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004) ahead of students to guide them along a pre-planned learning route, but of teachers walking alongside students to unknown learning destinations.

My struggle is twofold. Firstly, to express the richness of this opportunity in a way that spurs other teachers to take the risk whilst understanding that there is no simple route to autonomy in the classroom, which means avoiding easily recognised behaviourist terms and techniques and searching for a more complex language. Secondly, to recognise that the learning needed to pass ESOL exams and to progress will not be achieved if students are simply left to talk amongst themselves. There is a delicate balance in the teacher-student relationship which inevitably draws the discussion to behaviourist language when trying to express the teacher's role, making the search for apposite words complicated.

As I continue reflecting on the second question - what conditions does the research suggest support student autonomy? - I am working towards the third question - where does the concept of learner autonomy fit with ESOL educational approaches? I will consider key points from the literature review to work out what the elements for student agency might be.

I will look to a different group of thinkers: Alexander (2004, 2015, 2017), Biesta (2006, 2014) and Sennett (2012, 2018). Firstly, I will continue to investigate Biesta's ideas about teaching and learning allowing me to consider what is easily overlooked but what is at the heart of a good education. Secondly, the way

Alexander (ibid.) and Sennett (ibid.) write about conversation opens a way to consider discussion in circles. Therefore, the next part of this thesis aims to set out a theoretical overview for circles by looking at two contrasting theories of education. I will then move on to models of conversation and the role of conversation in circles.

Learner autonomy and educational approaches

The discussion above of Stefanou *et al.* (2004) points to three ways in which teachers can encourage autonomy in the circle classroom using organisational, procedural and cognitive support mechanisms. However, this support, particularly cognitive autonomy with its use of free discussion, requires careful structuring. Structuring activities is a useful way for teachers to lead their students towards an end goal - for students to learn, practise and eventually master it. This implies a form of controlled, product-focused teaching and learning.

This psychological view can be applied to some aspects of the circle method, such as the roles which focus on accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, and the tasks which focus on standardised output such as memorising the layout of a formal letter. However, with the potential of learner autonomy, there is a possibility for circles to be more.

Perhaps we can gain a wider view of circles in ESOL if we investigate what it might mean when different people, with different backgrounds, motivations, experiences, opinions and English language abilities talk and learn together. In this context, diversity is central. Here, the work of Biesta (2014) can help us to gain some insights towards my guiding questions - what conditions does the research suggest support student autonomy? Where does the concept of learner autonomy fit with ESOL educational approaches?

Biesta and a risky view of autonomy

Biesta has noted 'a new language of learning' (ibid, p.ix) in recent times. Examples of the contemporary educational language can be found in phrases such as learning outcomes, outputs and targets. These are the types of concerns which provide the context for this study. They promote a view of education as 'the domain of *qualification*, which has to do with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions' (ibid, p.4).

One way to go about imbuing students with qualification is to see education as a psychological process which begins at school and ends in adulthood. Education becomes a 'particular developmental and educational trajectory' that is spoken about with 'a vocabulary of "development", "preparation", "identity" and "control"' (ibid, pp.103-104).

For adult ESOL learners, the concept of qualification relates to the individual point at which they start their English language learning. This is unlikely to be a smooth, consistent 'trajectory', but one which has stopped and started, or has only just begun, as a result of personal life changes. The educational vocabulary, however, remains the same.

The psychological process entails entering education at a starting point and moving smoothly along to the finishing point, developing knowledge and skills along the way. It is similar to Coffield and Williamson's (2011) view of the exam factory, seeing education as a production line towards a set end product.

This educational route has 'become strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free' (Biesta, 2014, p.2). It creates the situation where lesson plans, learning outcomes, outputs and targets can be set, measured and accounted for. It is instrumental and predictable which is reassuring for the business of education.

The psychological approach also has implications for the personal outlooks that places of education hope to instil in their students. These are commonly accepted and expected to be about developing 'the person who possesses democratic knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions' (ibid., p.102).

This approach assumes that the educational journey itself 'brings about or creates democratic citizens' by virtue of 'working upon the individual's mind and body' achieved 'through engagement in democratic processes and practices' (ibid, pp.102-103). Therefore, following this model, by the time young pupils have completed their education and reached adulthood, they will be fully conversant with, and in control of their own, democratic ways of behaviour in society. Adult ESOL learners are supported in this journey with 'British Values' in the curriculum.

The system proposes to fit all types of different learners, including those in multicultural adult classrooms, into a standardised educational programme with uniform academic and social results. There is little room for learner autonomy where control is the watchword. Biesta (ibid.) spots a flaw in the psychological design when he comments that 'educational processes and practices do not work in a machine-like way' (ibid, p.x). This is particularly pertinent to the ESOL classroom which is made up of such a wide range of learners, where circle techniques encourage diversity in the classroom. The 'standard' feature, as such, of an ESOL classroom, is the presence of difference. This raises the question that if it is difficult to achieve the precise nature of the psychological, 'machine-like' education, what are the options?

Biesta and a complex view of autonomy in education

Biesta (2014) draws a different view of education to that seen in the modern 'domain of *qualification*' by referring to Hannah Arendt, particularly the concepts of 'Action, Freedom and Plurality' (ibid, p.104). Arendt (1958, cited in Biesta, 2014, p.104) explains that all humans are engaged in certain activities: the 'labour' of our biological processes to keep us alive, the 'work' we undertake in manipulating the natural world around us in order to make it comfortable to live in, and the 'action' we engage in with others.

Arendt's definition of action (1977, quoted in Biesta, 2104) allows a significant move from the psychological view of education towards a more existential approach. It invites us to see each individual student as 'a "beginning and a beginner"' (ibid., p.105) with other students who are also beginnings and beginners, whereby each new attempt by one can spark a response from another. Action needs a reaction in order for it take place as '*we cannot act in isolation*' (ibid., p.106). This sets up "being-together-in-plurality" (ibid., p.104): of acting with others. It also requires freedom - to be able to act in the first instance we need the freedom to do so and others need the freedom to respond.

This freedom brings unpredictability as we can never know how others will respond to our actions. We cannot pre-determine or control reactions as 'we always act upon beings "who are capable of their own actions"' (ibid., p.106). However, this freedom-in-plurality is important for enabling genuine democratic

action, rather than merely reaching 'the developmental stage called adulthood' (ibid., p.112)

During our actions, we inevitably reveal something of our unique self to others. Arendt sets down how 'it arises out of acting and speaking together... It is the space where I appear to others as others appear to me' (ibid. p.107). The 'space of appearance' exists when we are together, and being together successfully entails maintaining plurality, freedom and 'a way of existing together in which we bear with strangers and they bear with us' (ibid., p.114).

Integral to this way of being together includes tolerance, respect and recognising that we are all different. At the same time, by being unique we all share the common quality of being different: a 'connection-in-difference' (ibid, p.115). This volume of plurality means that there will always be a wide range of perspectives about the world around us which requires people to come to understandings together "'by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with, reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, trying to be at home in the world'", so that we can go on 'living "with other people, strangers, forever, in the same world"' (ibid, p.113).

We must think, make judgments and decisions and use our imagination to build multi-perspective understandings to help us not only cope with our own life experiences but to better comprehend those of others: 'for "putting things in their proper distance" and for "bridging the abysses to others"'(ibid., p.115)

At the same time as making accommodations for the differences between us, plurality also underlines the intricate and variable nature of action as it takes place with others, between unique beings, each capable of acting and reacting in unique ways. This is described by d'Entreves (2019, p.12) as:

...a network of actions and relationships that is infinitely complex and unpredictable. This network of actions is what makes up the realm of human affairs, that space where individuals relate directly without the intermediary of things or matter – that is, through language.

Language is an important element of Arendt's action. Speech is seen as a method for undertaking and organising action, and as a means to judge the truth of speakers as they reveal their experiences, to build connections and to create new understandings. This dual view of speech presents it as a functional necessity for human existence, and as a means of self-expression, which can be accepted or interrogated by others.

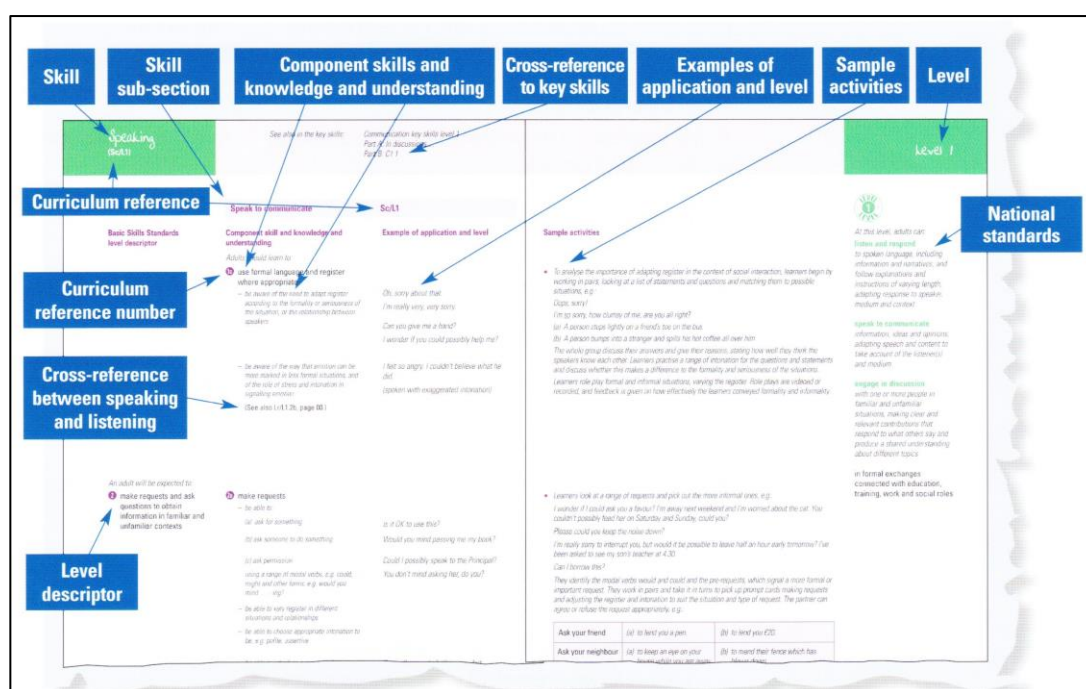
Under these circumstances, classrooms cannot only be 'machine-like' and risk-free, as the modern-day business of education seeks, where teaching and learning are tied to prescribed outcomes, such as the SfL curriculum. Biesta puts the classroom forward as a riskier place saying, 'The risk is there because education is not an interaction between robots but an encounter between human beings' (2014, p.1). This invites students to take ownership of their education, to participate, to support each other and to stride forward as individuals. It opens the way to a more autonomous experience. Considering where these angles are present in circle methods can help to link Biesta's discussion of Arendt, with the help of d'Entreves' analysis, to the ESOL classroom under investigation in this project.

Biesta and ESOL pedagogy

The psychological element in the classroom is a useful way to find key aspects which support the teaching and learning taking place. It helps to minimise the 'risk' of education through a methodical approach such as the national SfL AECC (DfES, 2001). Introduced at a time when grassroots practice was unrecognised and had little funding, the Curriculum was written with the best of intentions to support teachers and diverse groups of local learners with a wide range of learning needs (Rosenberg, 2007, pp.221-261). However, the relentless move towards government policy objectives, which have fixed ESOL to employment, citizenship and social cohesion, ignores the heterogeneous reality of ESOL teaching and learning in favour of the psychological approach.

The act of speech is codified in the AECC. It is identified as a sub-skill to 'Speak to communicate' under the general skill of 'Speaking'. It is given a Basic Skills Standards level descriptor, a curriculum reference, curriculum reference numbers, component skills, knowledge and understanding, examples of application and level and sample activities appropriate for the overall ESOL level and national

standards for adult literacy. This is the referencing system (ibid., pp.7-8) across the five ESOL levels and the four language skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.



2.1 SfL ESOL Core Curriculum referencing system

The coding arrangement sets out 'a detailed referencing system which enables individual component skills to be identified' (ibid., p.8). Each skill/sub-skill combination is given its own code. For example, E3 Speaking begins with the code Sc/E3.1a which means, 'Adults should learn to: use stress, intonation and pronunciation to be understood and to make meaning clear' (ibid., p.176). This is concerned with the mechanics of speaking: the physical process of reproducing sounds and rhythm in order to be comprehensible to others.

The initial teacher training of an ESOL tutor is to be a language teacher. It is concerned with teaching phonology, lexis and the meaning, form and use of grammatical structures. It is similar to a military 'lockstep' being formalised, controlled and repetitive in order to achieve an exact, uniform result. A typical traditional oral ESOL language lesson would entail the teacher presenting a target grammatical structure, modelling it, and using choral drills, closed pair practice, nominated drills, open pair practice and a consolidation activity for students to reproduce the target language and pronunciation.

The sample activities offered in the AECC (ibid., p. 177) for Sc/E3.1a suggest a carefully controlled movement from teacher-modelled to student practise of clapping, counting and humming syllables and stress in numbers, common words and a travel dialogue before using the given dialogue for a role play.

All of the students practise the same language, at the same time, in the same way. The teacher controls what is said and how it is said. The focus is on oral accuracy to meet a core curriculum reference on a scheme of work and a lesson plan. It is a closed activity, with a definitive end result, on a psychological branch of teaching and learning. There are four Basic Skills Standards level descriptors for 'Speak to communicate' broken down into 13 component skills, knowledge and understanding (ibid., pp.176–190).

ESOL SfL 'Speaking' also includes the sub-skill 'Engage in discussion'. This is mapped to two Basic Skills Standards level descriptors with 9 component skills, knowledge and understanding (ibid., pp.192–198).

The skill of 'Listening' has one sub-skill listed as 'Listen and respond'. This incorporates 7 Basic Skills Standards level descriptors with 20 components (ibid., pp.200-217).

The use of Basic Skills Standards indicate how the AECC has 'origins in a curriculum framework designed for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities' rather than in one for 'English language proficiency' (Learning and Work Institute, 2019, p.16). In addition, ESOL learning aims are pigeonholed with government policy objectives for employment and social cohesion. This background helps to explain the careful incremental nature and the content of SfL materials, activities, skills, knowledge and understanding.

The SfL system remains the framework for ESOL provision and assessment. ESOL is based on the Core Curriculum's National Standards contextualised 'in familiar formal exchanges connected with education, training, work and social roles' (ibid., p.177). This generally results in students participating in role plays where they are the customer or consumer. The 'Skills for Life Learner Materials Pack' (DfES, 2003a) with audio CDs and 'Skills for Life Teacher's Notes' (DfES, 2003b), supplement the AECC. The pack offers learning materials that include

eight units for Entry 3 with numerous activities to illustrate this point, such as Unit 2: Joining a leisure centre, Unit 3: Making a medical appointment and Unit 4: Phoning a guesthouse. All entail the teacher allocating roles and issuing pre-prepared role cards or background information in order for students to practise asking and answering topic questions as shoppers or service-users.

The mapping of ESOL speaking and listening in this way 'defines in detail the skills, knowledge and understanding non-native English speakers need in order to demonstrate achievement of the national standards' (DfES, 2001, p.2), which also applies to reading and writing. The reasoning for using the AECC is to ensure consistency in classrooms across the UK in terms of initial language assessment, course aims, organising schemes of work, developing individual learning plans, writing lesson plans, assessing and reporting on learner progress and the recording of achievements (ibid., p.10). This is indicative of Biesta's (2014) 'domain of *qualification*' in which students are expected to follow set patterns in the classroom in an echo of that which Arendt described as labour and work and d'Entreves explains as to "'behave", "perform roles", and "fulfill functions"...being guided by a model' (2019, p.12) such as the national AECC and its teaching materials.

A benefit of the national ESOL model is that it is stable, but it limits student autonomy in the classroom with a narrow curriculum that results in stock contexts, roles and language patterns for learners. Students are judged for "'what" they are', meaning their 'abilities and talents, as well as deficiencies and shortcomings' which they demonstrate as part of their course of study. In this respect all students are showing their 'sameness', where the things students say are constrained, and where they are 'subordinate to the end product' (ibid., p.13).

An ESOL pedagogy that aims to promote student autonomy would attend to Arendt's argument that speech is also an action with 'disclosing power'. This gives speakers the capacity to 'reveal "who" they are as distinct from "what" they are' (ibid., p.12).

Through speech, students may reveal their own unique personalities and identities to their listeners. Talking and listening attentively together, about points that have real meaning for the speaker, enable discussion about the deeper meaning of

what is said. Students will choose their own words to talk about their chosen topics, using their available language repertoire, rather than the confines of a pre-taught target structure.

There is an acknowledgment in the SfL materials that ESOL language learning is more than the regurgitation of rote expressions. For the AECC sub-skill 'Engage in discussion', the teaching and learning materials offer the chance for students to share their opinions such as the 'What do you think?' activity in Unit 5. This is an exercise in talking about life in the future and students are instructed to 'Work in small groups. Discuss your ideas about the future. Give your reasons for your opinions' (DfES, 2003a, p.13). However, the activity continues to control the type of language students are expected to produce with the instruction to use the example and any similar phrases known.

The psychological approach establishes expected language competencies that can be used to organise and measure teaching and learning in a consistent fashion, but it lacks the ability to capture the depth of human experience in communicative interactions. The former is a safer position for policy makers, managers, teachers and for some students to work from, as summarised by Penny Ur (1981, p.2), who says, 'It is much more difficult to get learners to express themselves freely than it is to extract right answers in a controlled exercise'. Herein lies the risky nature of Biesta's (2014) approach as it is in complete contrast to the locked down version of a SfL curriculum. Biesta's (ibid.) departure creates an opportunity for ESOL pedagogy closer to Arendt's sense based on the ideas of action, space of appearance, plurality and freedom for greater student autonomy.

Action amongst ESOL learners can be found where students are beginning a new life in a new country, beginning to learn a new language and are beginners at using the language. This is action undertaken by individual students for their own learning and as part of their collective learning. This learning action is in the range of communicative tasks across the four classroom skills and for life outside the college. Learning English language is an integral part of establishing a new life in Britain, and ties in with Arendt's idea of action as natality, where 'something "uniquely new" comes into the world' (1977, quoted in Biesta, 2006, p.81).

Balwant Rai Bubber, who featured in the BBC's adult learning initiative 'Ready to Learn' (2006), commented "It's been a second birth for me" in relation to moving from India to the UK with limited English skills to eventually completing a Masters degree. Not every ESOL student will go on to Higher education but each one is seeking their own place in UK society with the use of English language. Bubber's experience tells us about beginning to live and learn in a new community in a practical day-to-day application of action.

Arendt tells us that 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth' (1977, quoted in Biesta, 2006, p. 82). This type of action means individuals cannot help but reveal their personalities in the process of speaking and acting for themselves. This is very different to the activities provided for students in SfL. For example, the Entry 3, Unit 7, 'Meeting the neighbours' roleplay (DfES, 2003a, p.3) sketches out words and actions for learners to use to complete a verbal exchange with little room for individual character to shine through.

However, being your true self means using your own words and making your own responses in real-time situations as they unfold. Meeting neighbours may not always go as predictably as SfL suggests to end politely declining an invitation to have a cup of tea (DfES, 2003b, p.88).

The circle concept can allow students to think about what would happen if the scenario were different. Perhaps the neighbours might not be as friendly and welcoming as the SfL example. In 'Vusi Makusi' (Willis-Jones, 2018), a stimulus used in this circle investigation, a civil servant sent from the city to support a remote rural village is met with suspicion and hostility by the local inhabitants. The chance to talk about this fictional encounter enables students to relate it to their own lives – to consider alternative conversations, to share their own similar or alternative experiences: how they reacted, are working out how to respond currently, or might respond should they find themselves in an unfriendly situation in the future. Ways of responding to texts are discussed later in this chapter in the Reading Circles section, including how linking texts to self holds 'disclosing power' (d'Entreves, 2019, p.12) for readers to express who they are (Duncan, 2012).

A circle conversation then can be a way to experiment with a broader range of possible interactions with as yet unknown situations. It brings imagination to the thinking involved in judging and deciding potential courses of action.

Conversations are a way to practise interpersonal skills for talking with others. They can have many false-starts, backtracks, repetitions, digressions, agreements or disagreements. In unstructured conversations speakers and listeners cannot fully know what they are going to hear or say until the very moment of listening and speaking. Genuine conversations are more random than SfL dialogues, pointing to the non-linear nature of informal dialogic exchanges as discussed by Sennett (2012, 2018).

A circle discussion, despite using roles to structure the activity, is based on open-ended discussions. For example, the Discussion Leader's role is to explore their own opinions, thoughts and feelings arising from a text and to invite other members of the circle group to share their unique views. It aims to be as free-flowing as a spontaneous conversation between different people, but a natural conversation can also have difficult moments where interaction might breakdown. This raises points about the space of appearance being based in plurality and being risky to attain.

A circle cannot escape plurality. It is made up of individuals each with their own views and interests. The mix of different people has a direct bearing on how each circle conversation will develop, who is engaged to listen and who is moved to take the discussion up. The circle 'action' provides a space to speak, listen, to consider new ideas together and to deal with misunderstandings. A circle requires the members to 'bear with strangers' in order to keep the discussion going rather than letting it break down. Times of confusion, miscommunication and frustration between the members can arise such as when there are differences of opinion over the ideas a learner brings to the discussion, when a learner has not completed their role and seems to be letting the work of the group down, if a particular student appears to be speaking too much or too little. Burbules (2007) helps me to pursue this in more detail later in this chapter.

Difficulties in the action space indicate the fragility of discussion. Firstly, the space only appears when students willingly take up the chance to talk together – it

cannot be forced to exist. Secondly, it is only ever temporary, lasting only as long as the discussion itself. Thirdly, the space can be volatile, as there is always the risk of circle conversations over-heating and becoming fractured.

Nonetheless, it is important to try to keep an opening for such discussions in the classroom as a way of moving beyond the rigidity of SfL. The circle classroom uses structured activities to promote organic discussions. The pace and direction of each conversation is managed by the circle group, not the teacher. Students have freedom in the 'open and unpredictable nature of action' as each speaker and each listener 'sets in motion an unlimited number of actions and reactions which literally have no end' and which 'can neither be controlled nor reversed' (d'Entreves, 2019, pp.17-18). I will return to the positives and limitations of interactions and unforeseeable consequences later under models and critical views of conversation.

However with regards to circle action, student-led conversations give the learners agency, offering a 'space of appearance' (Biesta, 2014, p.107). Talking about things that really matter on a personal level is engaging and brings a dynamism to classroom conversations. The learning experience becomes authentic. Authenticity is missing from formalised, controlled, repetitive role plays that underplay individual lives. This sentiment was aptly expressed by one ESOL student in their mock E3 role play, "It's always about a washing machine or television. Why not about a car for a change?"

Formal teacher instruction in a circle session complements student-led discussions. This has significance because for the beginning of ESOL learning, traditionally known as 'Pre-Entry' but increasingly being recognised as 'New to ESOL' (Learning and Work Institute, 2019), the pedagogy holds that if a student cannot say something, they should not be expected to read or write it. ESOL beginners are helped to learn with language experience techniques which use students' existing oral English vocabulary as the starting point for developing skills. Individual knowledge is pooled for the benefit of other individuals and for the group as a whole. New to ESOL takes its cue from the learners where student talk provides personalised content for the follow-up teacher-led tasks.

Circles, in this context, exist in the space given in a semi-structured educational interaction. In the space, ESOL students make free use of language to speak together, in order to express themselves and to learn with and from others. The learning is in terms of language skills and shared understandings of life experiences in the wider world. A definition of 'action' in the circle method is the free use of English, and the free choice of discussion threads, by students in group dialogue. Voice and choice are meaningful in the circles approach (Daniels, 2002) redistributing or rebalancing power in the traditionally teacher-centric classroom to encourage learner autonomy.

Learner autonomy and circle features

We have seen Biesta (2014) set out two visions of education: one based on risk-free predictability and another based on the risk of unpredictable human interaction.

The former model can be spotted in circles where its teaching and learning is linked to the awarding body's assessment criteria that has informed the scheme of work, which directs teacher-controlled activities, and requires students to faithfully reproduce pre-determined language skills. It can be where ESOL TLA is pushed towards social cohesion and employability strategies.

The latter is found in the open discussions in circles which draw on action, space of appearance, plurality and freedom. ESOL learners are making new beginnings in a new language by learning together, by being together in the shared classroom space, by having someone to listen and respond to their ideas, to hear other unique contributions. They can share and build different perspectives and understandings. At the same time, they must deal with what it means to learn with others and to get along together.

The real advantage of Biesta's (ibid.) discussion of risky education is that it brings us back to noticing this aspect of the classroom which can be easily overlooked by the lure of the more psychological, accountable methods.

The difference is in the opportunity to have free space to talk and listen together, learning to be with others and dealing with plurality. Action in circles is in talking and freedom is in unfettered conversations that take place only in the moment.

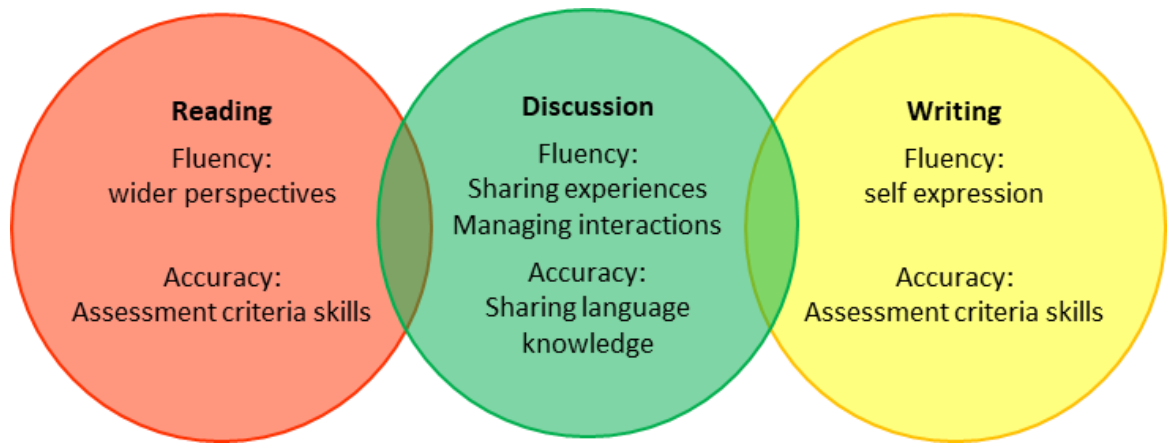
Conversations like this cannot be pre-planned. There is no opportunity to create a replicable model such as the set formal structure of assessed presentations. The circle teacher's role is limited as it can only set up a scaffold with texts and roles to stimulate learning conversations between students.

Students have autonomy in the freedom of their talk. They are not following a script. Through talk, students are beginners and make beginnings. Each idea shared prompts a response, a new idea, a new thought, bringing something new to the discussion for individuals and for the group.

A circle has the potential to expand the classroom beyond robotic practice and interactions. However, care must be taken to recognise where structured and controlled activities can be helpful in circle work. Knowing set phrases and conventions are useful to accomplish types of action where the power is one-sided, such as formal conversations with bank managers, the council, landlords and customer services, for example. Yet, you also need to know alternative words and reactions in anticipation of unforeseen twists and turns of these conversations, so a wide range of practice is useful in speaking and listening.

Wide practice also applies to reading and writing. For example, it is helpful to be able to reproduce the template layout of a formal letter from a psychological perspective, but an effective letter needs good content which the writer needs to know how to adapt depending on their issue and reader.

Circles, bound by policy and curriculum, make use of a teacher's lesson planning, selected texts and tasks and allocated roles to structure the class for the accuracy needed to meet the final assessment criteria. Student conversations direct the focus of each class towards a greater fluency gained through autonomous and mutual learning, which can expand beyond policy and curriculum boundaries. The diagram below summarises this in visual form:



2.2 Integrated circle features

Autonomy and models of conversation

Thinking about the concept of student conversations, I want to consider what makes a conversation. To begin, I have looked to Richard Sennett (2018). The main points relate to two competing ways of using oral language, four aspects of dialogic exchange and how people speak together using accepted social courtesies. These are ways in which people can manage their conversations and interactions.

Sennett (2012) also enables a consideration of the role conversation plays in circles. This contrasts dialectical approaches with dialogic communication and the effects these two models have on everyday conversation.

What makes a conversation?

When Sennett (2018) looks at different ways of using oral language, he sets his analogy of two types of conversation in ancient Greece. He tells of the Athenian marketplace, the agora, full of the hustle and bustle of trade, where business is done, where people mill around together and chat. It's a busy, noisy place where transactions not only assist the economy but also help to build relationships in an informal, unstructured way of greetings and gossip. It's a place of snatched, fragmented conversations. Sennett describes this a 'babble of voices' (ibid., p.208) and contrasts it with the business of Greek politics debated in an amphitheatre, the pnyx. This is a place where people sit and listen attentively to one speaker at a time. The listeners and speaker are separated from each other by the layout of the building with rows of seats and a stage. This place is identified by its controlled atmosphere and use of structured speech.

The agora and the pnyx indicate that different spaces create different conditions for conversation and that the ways of using oral language ensure that the type of conversation to be had there are different. It also highlights who has access to those conversations: who can speak, be heard or be allowed to listen in. Even in the ancient public marketplace, public did not mean access to all. The agora was only open to the citizens of Athens who made up no more than 15 – 20 per cent of the city's population. Slaves and foreigners were excluded (ibid., pp.206-207).

We might carry Sennett's analogy over to the modern day if we see a parallel with how contemporary foreigners – immigrants – are excluded from some types of conversations around them, such as proceedings central to ESOL planning and delivery. This would tie Sennett to the theme of voice and representation in ESOL which is generally missing at national and institutional policy levels. At the local level, within the classroom, the circle approach creates a space based on participation for all. It creates an opening where an inclusive sense of citizenship can be built and informal conversations can take place under certain conditions.

Sennett sets out four conditions which he sees as being necessary for effective informal conversation: listening well, collaboration, the use of impersonal language and non-linear conversational paths. These conditions create a situation ripe for dialogic exchanges (ibid., pp.194-97).

Firstly, by listening well, Sennett refers to people showing respect for the speaker. Listeners are charged with the responsibility of 'conveying willingness to take the speaker seriously - on his or her own terms' (ibid., p.192). Knowing you have the space to speak and be listened to goes a long way to building trust between the speaker and listener, and encourages further discussion.

Communication is further promoted by the type of voice used. Sennett distinguishes between the declarative voice and the subjunctive voice (ibid., pp.192-193). The declarative voice is a voice of authority. Imagine this voice in the pnyx as politicians deliver their speeches, given that 'The declarative voice asserting 'I believe X' or 'X is right, Y is wrong' can invite only agreement or disagreement in response' (ibid., p.192).

The subjunctive voice is more tentative and is not confrontational. This voice invites others to join in a discussion and to share views. Matters discussed are not clear cut. There is room for different interpretations and opinions.

The subjunctive voice is an informal voice. This is the marketplace voice as it is '...a more sociable way to speak than the declarative. People can be more open, exchange more freely, feel less uptight and behave less defensively; they are not fighting their corner' (ibid., p.192-193). It is a voice that invites co-operation.

Sennett notes another type of voice, the 'it voice', which allows people to talk about matters in an impersonal way. This is a third aspect of dialogical exchange. Its purpose is to distance speakers from each other. This is the voice Sennett imagines strangers use with each other making small talk, or residents use with each other as they discuss the positives and negatives of where they live. Not only does this voice maintain a privacy between the speakers but they are 'freed up to range, to observe and to judge' by being 'focused outwards rather than inwards...more evaluative and critical' (ibid., p.194). The 'it voice' fits in with the idea of a dialogical exchange by helping to keep a conversation going by widening it beyond personal experiences. Minimising individual experience might also work to take the heat out of any potential clashes of personal opinion, which could cause communication to break down. Impersonal exchanges can provide a shield for the deeply personal in circle conversations (Duncan, 2012).

A fourth key conversational skill for Sennett is the ability to maintain informal conversations. This draws on being able to listen well and to pick up on which of the salient points to follow as conversations naturally unfold. It allows for people to take up and develop random ideas that become significant in the course of talking together. This is opposite to the formal and formulaic declarative voice as it allows for a spontaneous exploration of meaningful topics as they arise.

Sennett borrows a term from open-systems analysts to describe the twisting and turning flow of informal conversation as 'non-linear path dependencies' (ibid. p.195). The process of following organically-occurring interesting points dictates the end shape of the conversation. This can bring a dynamism to conversation as different voices meet and cross.

This is a relevant point for the integrated circles project as the discussion groups are made up of a mix of people and there are many voices waiting to be heard. The approach can offer different people a place for their own voice in the shared space of the classroom. This includes a message about the place of dialogic teaching and learning in the circle, which is considered later in this chapter with Robin Alexander's (2015, 2017) dialogic pedagogy.

For a person's voice to be heard, they must negotiate their place in the shared space. Sennett offers a solution for this in the way in which people use accepted social courtesies as a way of keeping the lines of communication open. This is what he terms the 'mask of civility' (2018, pp.140-143) and believes it is worn especially at times of social tension in order to keep community relations intact. It is made up of the norms of small talk to smooth daily life between people. This may only be a friendly façade hiding people's true feelings about each other, but it is what 'builds the bridge' in a troubled, mixed community as 'the rituals of getting along' serve to minimize differences (ibid., p.143).

There may be a clue here for how circles might help to build relationships in the classroom. Students and teachers are certainly operating in a space full of difference and we can never truly know how much of different personalities, opinions and experiences others choose to reveal or to keep private. However, the idea put forward that it is better not to draw attention to difference, or as Sennett says, 'that mixed communities work well only so long as consciousness of the Other is not foregrounded' (ibid., p.143) runs counter to circles where cultural difference is identified as a way to promote a deeper understanding of the other. What is useful is the concept of civility as it relates to a caring attitude and respect for each other, highlighting themes from Lipman (2003) considered in the 'Speaking, Listening and Thinking Skills' section of this chapter to come.

These elements of discourse: a loose informal structure, dialogic exchange and a respectful etiquette are ways to help create conditions for conversation. They help to build trust between people which in turn builds a self-confidence to speak and that enables the building of voice. Voice appeared in the discussion of ESOL context and reappears in the various circles methods considered below.

As this project is particularly interested in investigating the role of conversation in circles, I will now look again at Sennett to try to discover more about its role in the method.

What role does conversation play in circles?

Sennett (2012) helps us to think about what counts as a 'good' conversation. He bases his discussion on his experience of trialling GoogleWave, an abortive attempt to design a programme for online co-operation. This can tell us much about how communication works best in the face-to-face world by focusing on the issue of co-operation to make meaning, rather than communication as a simple information-sharing exercise.

Sennett attributes the failure of GoogleWave to 'its dialectical, linear structure' (ibid., p.17). This was an inability to take into account the randomness of human communication – the non-linear path dependencies. This acted to close down discussions, narrowing communication to certain viewpoints. We see this in operation in the field of ESOL where official voice sets the agenda for what can be said and crowds out the marginalised voice. The ESOL classroom is tied to restricted texts, tasks, topics and prescribed assessment criteria as the only acceptable version of language.

The dialectical GoogleWave structure also 'failed to account for the complexities which develop through cooperation'. One of these complexities is how layers of meaning develop in dialogic exchanges (ibid., p.17). Dialogic communication is informal and open-ended but such contributions in ESOL are tolerated less and less as schemes of work are anchored to the AECC and the awarding body's assessment criteria.

These documents control what type of conversation is deemed to be acceptable in order to pass exams. Judgements are not made on a person's ability to communicate ideas fluently but on their ability to demonstrate a specific range of technical skills. Speaking and listening in the real world is not the same as the artificial roles students are required to model under exam conditions. For example, under Ascentis, skills assessed at E3 focus on formal communication: giving a presentation about a set topic and participating in a role play to plan and agree a course of action to solve a consumer or workplace difficulty. Presentations can be

rehearsed in front of the target audience and follow-up questions and answers can be prepared and practised in advance of the assessment day. Role plays follow a set pattern to discuss a given scenario and agree a plan with the assessor. Rote procedures such as these are unlike real-life communication which doesn't ordinarily come with the time to pre-establish with your audience what will be spoken and heard or plan the path of the conversation. Everyday natural conversations tend to be informal and do not have pre-set conclusions.

When we speak informally we usually think 'in the moment', at the time of speaking. The speaker's aim is to communicate and the listener aims to comprehend but this is a messier activity than the formal assessment process paints.

The activity of speaking and listening is a form of co-operation. The listener has as much of a role to play as the speaker: a conversation cannot exist unless there is someone to listen and respond. Both parties have to co-operate to work out intended meanings and interpretations and to clarify with each other as the conversation develops. It is a process in which layers of meaning are built up organically and lets people really think about their own ideas and alternatives, to appreciate 'how rich can be the experience of responding to others' (ibid., p.29). A circle conversation is a counterpoint to an assessed conversation.

Taking Sennett's (2012; 2018) points together to inform the role of conversation in circles it can be seen as being to widen communication as participants express their own experiences in their own way, to articulate their connections and make them real for others. It invites critical reflection based on mutual respect. It works to build relationships, share language learning and provide a cultural exchange when it works well. Of course, there are times when conversation might not work so well which is a point I will return to later.

Sennett (ibid.) points to certain similarities and differences with Biesta's (2014) views of education. These elements could be a bridge between existing educational approaches and the autonomous integrated circle classroom.

- The idea of two types of communication: dialectic and dialogic, mirror the division between the language of official policy and the democratic nature of circles.

- The non-linear and wide ranging nature of informal dialogic discussions meets the type of circle conversations promoted by Daniels (2002) and Furr (2004).
- The difficulties Sennett sees in a 'babble of voices' gaining superficial or erroneous understanding from fragmented snatches of conversation in large, busy groups is overcome in circles with the use of small groups to limit numbers. The use of selected texts, tasks and roles also helps to direct conversations for all group members in the initial stages as a springboard to freer discussion.
- The idea that different personalities may clash (Burbules, 2007) and need to be managed in order for people to get along is taken up by Gunnery's (2007) writing circles.
- The need to be civil, to co-operate and to be caring towards each other points to Lipman's (2003) 'Community of Enquiry'.
- Sennett's vision of dialogic communication is a precursor to the discussion of Alexander's (2017) model of dialogic teaching. Discussion and dialogue enhance collaboration between learners learning about each other as well as language.
- Trust needs space and time to grow and as trust builds between people they may feel more confident to let their voices be heard. The integrated circle method can offer time and space to build classroom voice and confidence within a restricted curriculum.

Sennett indicates ways in which people can manage their interactions (2018) and how dialogic communication can enhance everyday conversations (2012).

Sennett's (2018) four conditions for dialogic exchanges of listening well, collaboration, the use of impersonal language and non-linear conversational paths are useful considerations for circle conversations. When these conditions are in place, each learner is personally responsible for inviting others to join in a conversation and to keep it moving forwards in a manner that lets all voices be heard. It can create space for diverse views to be shared, questioned, accepted or challenged and links this kind of dialogue to cognitive autonomy.

People have more open conversations in their real day-to-day communities than the formulaic role plays and presentations practised in the classroom to prepare for speaking and listening exams. Set ways of speaking are managed learning

activities and reminds us of the other aspect of the classroom as a controlled space.

An irony in circles is that whilst the circle model can release students to talk about their own important issues in a natural and informal way, it does so out of to the careful scaffolding put in place by the teacher. A circle is not an unprompted conversation.

Pedagogy for circles

In order to transpose Sennett's (2012; 2018) ideas of dialogic communication in the community to the structured classroom, I have considered what pedagogy means. I have looked at different views of pedagogy in Gregson and Hillier (2015, pp.247-273) to help explore it for circles.

Pedagogy could be explained generally as a practise to develop increasingly complex skills and abilities through structured teaching and learning, modified as required to respond to individual learning needs (Simon, 1981). For ESOL, the key structure of the AECC focuses lessons on a behaviourist or psychological pedagogy for accurate skills and qualifications (Coffield, 2008; Biesta, 2010) and any modifications result from the decisions individual teachers make to better support their particular learners in their particular contexts.

Teachers' decisions may be based on intuitive beliefs (Bruner, 1996) such as my feeling from my early circle investigations that conversations about reading and writing helped reading and writing skills to develop. Biesta (2010) suggests teachers constantly reflect, using practical wisdom alongside research-evidence, to make pragmatic judgements for the unique needs of unique students in unique contexts, such as my teaching of ESOL in new circle ways.

My thinking about an integrated circles pedagogy has been informed by my professional day-to-day classroom experience and my previous circles research, which itself was informed by others' previous research and practices (Lipman, 2003; Gunnery, 2007; Furr, 2009) who were informed by others (Bloom, 1956; Daniels, 2002). The link through myself and the line of thinkers and practitioners is pedagogy. My developing circle practice is a fusion of contemporary personal

ESOL experience with historical expressions of different possibilities and limitations for teaching and learning.

Pedagogy is limited when it is inside a tight curriculum with instrumental ends (Pring, 1999) so that learning is a training method rather than an educational experience (Corson, 1985). Education-for-training promotes checklists of surface-level learning such as the AECC and awarding body's assessment criteria which distract attention from the type of learning that really matters (Oates, 2010).

Arguments for learning-that-matters call for education to run deeper. It should encourage individuals to think in more complex ways about subject knowledge and their own and others' thoughts and feelings to learn about being democratic citizens (Dewey, 1916; Bernstein, 1996; Galton, 2007). There is a focus on constructivist or existential pedagogy for fluency that requires a curriculum rich with spaces for learners to participate in problem-solving and problem-finding discussions (Hiddleston and Unwin, 2007).

Participatory discussions include judicious use of teacher questioning (Perrot, 1982; Pohl, 2001) and opportunities for students to direct and extend their own classroom thinking and conversations with teacher support (Gibbs, 1981; Black and Wiliam, 1998; Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). The role of the teacher and the importance of learner conversation brings my attention to Alexander (2107) and dialogic teaching, within wider discussions of what pedagogy can be, on the basis that circles are space for dialogue.

Alexander's (2004) view of pedagogy rests on four key areas: firstly, what is to be taught, who is to be taught and how. For circles, this relates to the teaching and learning of the AECC, the multilingual and multicultural adult students with me as a participant-teacher-researcher and the circle method in which skills accuracy and language fluency are explored through conversations. Conversations are spaces in the ESOL curriculum where learners' lived experience is a source of individual knowledge, peer learning and animates the core content.

Secondly, there are requirements and expectations of the institution, such as the college's priorities, and those arising from education policy including centrally prescribed matters of curriculum, inspection and improvement concerns. Thirdly,

there are purposes and values found in wider society which frame the possibilities of education policy for immigrants. These issues are underpinned by a fourth aspect in the shape of teachers' personal educational values and aims, setting up pedagogy as 'the act of teaching and the body of knowledge, argument and evidence it embodies and by which particular classroom practices are justified' (ibid., p.10).

There are a range of complementary and contrasting views on what dialogic teaching is. Kim and Wilkinson (2019) set out a review of various conceptions of this pedagogical approach and note two common threads.

Firstly, a strong theme emerging is the environment in the classroom for interaction between all participants: teacher with student(s), student(s) with teacher and student(s) with student(s). Such an environment creates space to build relationships, express voice and explore differences similar to Sennett's dialogic communication (2012; 2018). Kim and Wilkinson express the environment as a way to 'foreground the close relationship between talk and culture' (2019, p.83).

The second theme focuses on cognitive effects which 'capitalizes on the power of talk to further students' thinking, learning and problem solving' (ibid., p.83). The way in which different types of talk can enhance learning provides a clarity to the type of speaking and listening events made possible as the integrated circle process emerges in diagram 2.13.

Kim and Wilkinson (ibid., p.71) organise their discussion around Alexander's work on the basis of it being a respected comprehensive model which has informed education policy in England and international scholarship. They provide an opportunity to use Alexander to probe dialogic teaching for this study. The dual possibilities of dialogic teaching to open up classroom spaces and to attend to formal teaching and learning through the use of talk holds merit for the circles investigation.

Pedagogy: What is a learning conversation?

Alexander (2017) sets out how he has been developing the concept and application of dialogic teaching, initially in primary education and more recently its take up in lifelong learning and the idea of learning community.

Dialogic teaching includes three teaching strategies which Alexander calls 'repertoires'. The repertoires are known as organising interaction, teaching talk and learning talk. Alexander's own overview of the repertoires (Gregson *et al.*, 2015, pp.179-182), uncovers key points for this project related to learner autonomy.

The first strategy, organisation, recognises five possible forms of classroom interaction that account for learning at the student, small group and whole class levels. A teacher uses their professional judgement to manage the types of interaction, which are:

- Whole class teaching
- Collective group work
- Collaborative group work
- Teacher-led one-to-one activity
- Student-led pair work.

For the circles method, this would also include students undertaking individual work.

Alexander's forms of organisation create a mix of teacher-controlled and student-directed interactions based on a combination of scaffolded and autonomous work. Yet, when a student undertakes their individual work to prepare for the circle, to contribute to the discussion and to complete their written task, they add self-interaction or individual thinking to Alexander's list, linking to cognitive autonomy (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004).

The second strategy, teaching talk, highlights five types of communication in the classroom which extend traditional teacher-directed instruction towards independent conversation and eventually autonomous understanding. A teacher uses their professional judgement to employ the type of talk best suited to the learning activity taking place. The types of talk are:

- Rote
- Recitation
- Instruction / exposition
- Discussion
- Dialogue

For the circles method, this would also include student communication with self, or individual talk.

Alexander explains how organisation and teaching talk repertoires combine for classroom teaching (ibid., p.181). I have extended his table to include individual work and talk in circles:

Organisation	Teaching talk				
	Rote	Recitation	Exposition	Discussion	Dialogue
Whole class teaching	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Collective group work (teacher led)		✓	✓	✓	✓
Collaborative group work (pupil led)				✓	✓
One-to-one (teacher led)		✓	✓	✓	✓
One-to-one (pupil led)				✓	✓
Individual (self-led)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

2.3 Extended organisation and teaching talk in integrated circles

Individual work is where a student is thinking about the stimulus, making notes for their own allocated circle role, pondering ideas raised by peers and teacher, developing their writing task and reflecting on the assessment and how to make improvements for future work. Before this thinking can be shared aloud in the circle, it starts as silent and internal speech (Vygotsky, 1986), whilst the student starts finding and making meaning from the stimulus and new ideas, to complete activities and to self-reflect on progress.

Individual communication is present in all activities. For rote learning it can be self-rehearsal of items such as grammar structures, spelling or pronunciation; recitation can include self-checking of answers; instruction can be where students spur themselves on to complete a task; exposition can be when students privately

recap knowledge gained so far; discussion can take the form of under-the-breath or mental comparisons of ideas to solve problems; and dialogue can be self-questioning to gain a better understanding of concepts and principles.

Organisation and teaching talk help me see a useful pedagogical structure as I move towards an integrated circle process. This will be helpful as I develop the practical method in Part 2 of this chapter. The third repertoire, learning talk, identifies fifteen ways in which students can talk together. This suggests ways in which the circle discussion process might work where learning talk is activated across the stages of the integrated circle model.

Learning talk offers eleven ways of speaking and four ways of listening which work in conjunction for effective communication. Circles extend this to include self-communication and individual thinking:

Speaking with others and self	Listening and thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrate • Explain • Instruct • Ask different kinds of question • Receive, act and build upon answers • Analyse and solve problems • Speculate and imagine • Explore and evaluate ideas • Discuss • Argue, reason and justify • Negotiate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be receptive to alternative viewpoints
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about what they hear
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give others time to think

2.4 Extended learning talk in integrated circles

Alexander (2015, p.182) notes that researchers usually focus on teacher-controlled talk and student responses to it, rather than the learners own forms of communication. This has direct bearing on the role of conversation in the circle method as a tool for cognitive development. The link between circles and the principle of dialogic teaching could be that they both offer a greater opportunity for students to develop ‘the forms of oral expression and interaction which they need to experience and eventually master...on which different kinds of thinking and understanding are predicated’ (ibid., pp.181-182).

Learning talk repertoires in circles take place with others and self, in other words group and individual cognitive autonomy. However, from Alexander (ibid.), the concept of autonomy is something that is nurtured by the teacher and is enabled to grow throughout the primary education years. For the circle, in use with adult learners, autonomy is acknowledging pre-existing cognitive abilities to help with language learning. However, it may be new for some learners to actively think about their own learning.

Feedback from teacher, peers and self-reflection require students to ask and answer questions, explain their understanding, be responsible for their own reasoning and to think about their learning journey to date and what they still need to work on. The process is similar to the five principal features of Alexander's dialogic classroom (2017, p.28) where the teacher makes judicious use of collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful work which connect to organisational, procedural and cognitive autonomy support. In circles, these features are co-regulated by students and teachers with cognitive autonomy support as the significant 'motivator that leads to deeper involvement in learning and self-motivated scholarship' (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004, p.105).

The idea of dialogic teaching has useful connections with the idea of an integrated circle method. An integrated circle involves students utilising the full learning talk repertoire. The circle is focused on the kinds of talk the students engage in and respond to, rather than their responses to teacher-controlled questions, statements, instructions and evaluations.

This is similar to Shirley Clarke's (2001) view of questioning in the classroom, used as a means to 'close the gap' in learning for growing understandings. Such questions can be literal or higher order, or take the form of prompts used as reminders, scaffolds or examples.

However, what is crucial to remember for circles is that questions and answers are usually generated by the students. Sometimes student questions are to explore own or peers' emerging trains of thought in reaction to the stimulus, language points, teacher's input, tasks, feedback or reflection. Other times questions are used to clarify and build understanding as part of the sharing of life experiences, cultural traditions and viewpoints that contribute to a circle discussion. This type of

student collaboration refers back to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978).

The circle itself is the learners' domain. The teacher's role is to facilitate.

The teacher is responsible for introducing the class to the circles concept and roles. They also choose appropriate stimuli suitable for their students' level, which provide thinking and talking points and model the teaching point.

They organise the students into their circle groups, adapting these arrangements depending on the number of students present on the day. As the members form their group(s), the teacher might need to recap the working method of the circle, and indicate to the Discussion Leader the time to commence.

The teacher then steps back and listens to discussions develop. They note common language difficulties to feature in mini-lessons, step in with a question or prompt if a discussion starts to falter, take care to notice who is joining in and who is not and supports the quiet members contribute – for example, with direct questions and then withdrawing, or by reminding the circle of their responsibility for this. They monitor for the natural conclusion of the discussion and provide opportunities for different circle groups operating in the same session to exchange ideas to summarise the separate discussions. Then they move the session on to a linked activity.

The teacher bookends a circle: to introduce the stimulus and organise the discussion groups; to draw it to a conclusion and extend it via a mini-lesson or follow-up task.

When Alexander provides his overview of various interpretations of the term 'pedagogy' ranging from the pedagogic traditions in continental Europe of general and subject-specific pedagogies, to differing definitions of pedagogy as a science, a craft, a pragmatic response based on experience, or a flexible combination of these ideas, he includes Eisner's view that pedagogy is an art 'influenced by qualities and contingencies that are unpredicted...[and] the ends it achieves are often created in the process' (2004, p.13). This sets the scene for Duncan's point

to follow that the circle 'process remains largely unknown or mysterious' (2014, p.4) so that the outcomes of the method cannot be pre-determined or predicted.

This view of pedagogy is empowering for the ESOL circle classroom. It allows separate classes to move their discussions organically towards the learning areas of most interest or importance to them and enables the teacher to respond to this in their planning. It frees the sessions from slavishly following a set sequence of assessment criteria to become more relevant to individual, group and class needs. This is a possible way to give teachers and students a voice, at least in the classroom, which Hamilton and Hillier (2009) highlighted in Chapter 1 as being absent from discussions at a national level on ESOL provision and policy.

Further echoes of Hamilton and Hillier (ibid.) can be found in the themes of policy, provision, the growing emphasis of language learning for work and ESOL pedagogy. As national ESOL policy concerns of employability and integration have grown, we have seen tighter controls on curriculum content and desired outcomes. This narrows classroom TLA options for teachers who are pressurised to demonstrate 'excellence in practice', as stated in the college's '*Observation of Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, August 2018*'. The pressure is carried forward to inspections and exam results but by employing the three repertoires of organising interaction, teaching talk and learning talk, Alexander (2015) offers teachers a way to reassert their role as professionals capable of drawing on their full range of experience, and their knowledge of their students. This allows for teachers to make situated choices about the most effective TLA practices for their classes - decisions which they are able to justify, continually reflect upon and amend in order to build their pedagogic practice.

A critical view of conversation and circles

So far in my analysis, conversation has played the central position in circles in terms of enabling the teaching and learning of language points, developing strong relationships and the sharing of different experiences of the world lived. This thesis has concentrated on the essentially democratic, inclusive and participatory nature of circles. It indicates that through the power of dialogue ESOL students can develop their language skills and knowledge and share personal understandings of the world as they react to circle texts, tasks and each other. Circle conversations can also potentially clarify misunderstandings or fill gaps in

knowledge. This suggests that being in a group and talking with others can naturally lead to learning, resolve confusion or disagreements and encourage people to get along.

However, Sennett (2012, 2018) has already indicated that dialogue can be a complicated process. On the one hand, different forms of communication can serve to differentiate between formal and informal relationships, and informal conversations can cement relationships when those taking part show they are listening well, collaborating, using impersonal language and following non-linear conversational paths. On the other hand, outwardly friendly conversations can hide tensions related to differences which can divide those who are speaking together. This is pause for thought over how effective circle conversations can be as they involve a mix of people from diverse cultures navigating their differences to maintain harmonious relations.

The idea of difference and diversity in dialogue has also been taken up by Burbules (2007). He comments that talking about difference is not always easy, neither is it always easy for different people to get on with each other. Burbules' argument resonates with this ESOL circle investigation as it places dialogue in the world of multicultural difference and identifies that conditions of diversity can create difficulties for dialogue. This adds an important note of caution for this project. By shining a critical light on what circles can hope to achieve we must be aware that there are limits to the role of conversation in the circle process.

Dialogue and diversity

Burbules (ibid.) presents difficulties of dialogue around the issue of diversity, such as which language is used, what discussion topics are allowed and how participation is framed. He identifies three broad responses to these difficulties: pluralism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. Each of these models of dialogue has tried to address diversity in its own way and each has its limitations.

Pluralism, or the 'melting pot' theory, attempts to recognise the diverse range of social and cultural beliefs, values and experiences within a conversation but usually results in a general compromise based on middle ground views. This is unsatisfactory for Burbules as the result of pluralism is 'to erase significant cultural difference or to relegate it entirely to the private, not public, sphere' (ibid., p.514).

Multiculturalism takes an inclusive approach by celebrating cultural diversity and difference but this often takes place within a framework where the dominant culture remains intact. Opportunities for critical reflection and questioning are overlooked in the failure to see other cultures as ‘critical points of reference against which to view one’s self’ (ibid., p. 515).

Cosmopolitanism suggests that difference and diversity can co-exist but where cultures are vastly different there must be occasions where it is not possible to reach a compromise of views. In such a situation, it would be better to not to engage in dialogue rather than risk escalating disagreement. The issue here is that opportunities for learning about others and attempting to reach agreements are rejected, thus ‘excluding both the possibility of mutual accommodation and the possibility of a critical questioning of one view from a radically different other’ (ibid., p.515).

Burbules (ibid.) notes that his early thoughts on dialogue suggested it could support a range of outcomes starting with agreement, moving on to consensus and ideally reaching an understanding or at least a tolerance of different views. After further consideration, he concluded that this view needed to be expanded to take into account three limitations of dialogue: it is not on a single continuum; the role for misunderstanding needed to be expanded, and that difference is enacted meaning we need to give a central place to the context alongside or even over difference. Context is significant for this investigation being set in a specific location and being small-scale.

Burbules (ibid.) comments that, in contrast with the prescriptive model of dialogue which assumes participants have common expectations of the communicative process, it is in reality highly susceptible to the effects of who, when, where and how dialogue takes place. This highlights the role of difference within dialogue, such as varying cultural values, communication purposes, the difficulty of speakers and listeners fully understanding each other’s intent, the impact of different locations and means of communication. This indicates that dialogue is variable and does not have stable outcomes. This has implications for how circles may or may not work in ESOL and how they may or may not transfer to other contexts.

Applying Burbules (ibid.) to the circle investigation gives rise to a series of critical questions:

- Although the method aspires to be democratic and inclusive, are restrictions on participation imposed by the process?
- How does the circle cope with misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication?
- How does the method respond to disagreement over different or incompatible points of view? Where does it sit between pluralism, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism?
- How can the potential outcomes of this study be analysed usefully for ESOL and other contexts?

My ambition from the outset has been to consider an authentic view of circles as a learning process and how the method utilises the power of talk. Burbules expresses how dialogue is ideally placed to support this aim when he notes it brings 'the possibility of open, respectful, critical engagements from which we can learn about others, about the world, and about ourselves' (ibid., p.513).

Circle conversations can emulate wide-ranging conversations and provide instances of agreement, disagreement, difference and response which the students manage in real time. This dimension of student autonomy echoes how dialogue is variable and does not always have stable outcomes (Burbules, 2007). Circle conversations are more genuine than the staged SfL exam tasks as they allow students to talk about the things that are important to them, and the speakers cannot know what their peers will ask or say in response. This unpredictability and uncertainty provides an authenticity, closer to adult experience whilst the circles structure makes it possible to support adult students extend their skills.

Burbules reminds us that it is essential to remain aware of critical responses to dialogue as it does not come with 'an unalloyed benefit to all potential parties' (ibid., p.516). This must be taken into account to bolster the evaluation of the circle method in this study so that both positive and negative results are given due consideration. There are particular issues I need to look out for in the project's data in connection with the critical questions above on models of dialogue and the limitations of dialogue in the integrated circle method.

Conversation, Discussion and Dialogue

From reviewing informal and learning conversations, I can expect to see different forms of communication in circles. Three forms of classroom communication are relevant for circles: conversation, discussion and dialogue. Each extends the other and can be linked to different ways the teacher and students manage circle interactions.

Starting with conversation, in the semi-formal classroom circle the teacher has facts that she needs to relay or check with students – facts about the circle process, for input stages, feedback and assessment criteria or questions to test students' comprehension and knowledge, for example. This is a one-sided conversation where 'the teacher retains absolute control over the answers and therefore the direction of the interaction' (Alexander, 2014, p.13). It is also in the circle where students share with each other information that they know, or want to check, focused on SfL elements. Conversations about language skills at word, sentence or text levels are related to basic information-giving and receiving where participants offer simple agreement or disagreement on the specific point talked about. Participants may choose not to show their disagreement for the sake of preserving social relations and to hold on to their existing personal views (Sennett, 2018).

Discussions offer the chance to develop conversations. An initial conversational point can branch off in unexpected directions in a 'wandering' (Sennett, 2018, p.194) as the listener spots an interesting point and turns the conversation in a new direction to explore a new topic. Discussions are 'a reciprocal process in which ideas are bounced back and forth and on that basis take [participants'] thinking forward' (Alexander, 2014, p.24). Talking becomes an opportunity to think and reason for self and with others and is non-linear, which starts to break up the controlled use of conversation for circle learning. It is also where different opinions may be voiced and acknowledged towards reaching a consensus.

Dialogue widens and deepens communication further. The speaker and listener co-operate to explore topics that emerge from their interaction and build up a meaning together from the sharing of different views and experience. This a complex way of communicating where the everyday social conventions used to

maintain conversation and discussion draw on a stronger commitment to respond with greater expression, imagination and trust (Sennett 2012). Dialogue includes ambiguity and 'a much wider range of responses' than conversation allows for (Sennett, 2018, p.192). This brings space for learner autonomy as students identify topics and language points to pursue and attempt to solve. This brings an authenticity to classroom discourse as there are no specific 'correct' answers. Instead, there are opportunities for different people to share different thoughts and knowledge from different perspectives and life experience which can be for completing class language learning tasks and for expressing and sharing identities (Alexander, 2014).

With greater room for individual opinions and personalities in dialogue, there is a greater chance of disagreement and a greater potential for communication failure (Burbules, 2007). Participants risk being challenged in dialogue so they are required to collaborate with others in ethical ways (Sennett, 2108) to be critical, caring and co-operative (Lipman, 2003).

Different stages of the circle will activate different forms of interaction at different times. An integrated circle will combine the three types of interaction depending on the focus of each circle stage (Diagram 2.13). Running through the circle process is the recognition that the method thrives on co-operation and trust which is a more complex way of people being together in the classroom than that controlled through national and institutional policy directives.

Summary

At this point, the discussion is related to three key themes from Chapter 1 which impact on ESOL – immigration, the economy and social integration. These themes colour the subject-specific guidance literature - the AECC and Teacher Reference File. Language learning is concentrated on the three themes through activities designed to practise 'exchanges connected with education, training, work and social roles' (DfES, 2001, p.177). The structuring, coding and materials set out in the ESOL literature fall into a psychological view of education as a regulated, safe series of steps to achieve accurate language skills presented as learning objectives.

Biesta (2018) has offered a different view of education based on weakness in the classroom. Weaknesses are those areas that cannot be controlled or contained so easily by a framework of skills and objectives making classrooms more complex spaces. They are noticeable in fluid student-led interactions which are not designed to practise language accuracy but draw on fluency. These do not come easily in the classroom as there are no guaranteed steps to produce the conditions ripe for dynamic conversation, discussion and dialogue. Interactions between individuals are susceptible to human variations, but they are worth pursuing in search of a learning environment rich with action, plurality, the space of appearance and freedom which can create conditions for student autonomy.

A balance between these two opposing models of education could enable a fairer scenario for ESOL teachers and students. The tension between the two models runs throughout this project. The circles approach borrows elements from an organised curriculum but is always aiming for the vitality of an autonomous experience. The contrast is reflected in circle roles as some focus on underpinning language skills for basic communication and others aim at language for deeper and more personal interactions.

As this chapter continues, I will look at further relevant literature to identify these themes in ESOL teaching and learning at a general level. I will also consider how the themes relate to the circles project in particular. This will consider barriers to good ESOL pedagogy and what enables good ESOL teaching and learning.

This chapter presents an overview of different circle methods and a possible working model for an integrated model to illuminate how the circle method can work for teachers as a practical classroom activity, what it means for students experiencing the method and what the outcomes might be. This will be helpful later in this thesis for identifying the types of events, actions and opinions from the circle process that could become part of the analysis of this research project.

The investigation of this literature aims to answer three main questions

1. What are circles?
2. What would an integrated circle method look like?
3. What would the integrated method look like in an ESOL context?

Part 2: Circle Literature

The Circle Method

This investigation of the circle method provides an opportunity to explore a traditional TLA method. It is based on the idea of a group of people gathering together to talk through different findings, views and opinions on a particular issue in order to share perspectives and come to some form of general consensus. This is not a modern-day phenomenon as this type of communal decision making has long historical roots (Duncan, 2014, p.19) as people, in the process of forming their communities, build and organise their civic structures.

Circles in education have historically taken three separate approaches. Firstly, they have been used as a group activity mainly using works of fiction to develop reading fluency and comprehension (Daniels, 2002; Furr, 2004). Secondly, they have been used to develop writing skills (Gunnery, 2007). Thirdly, the approach has been used for speaking and listening, particularly to develop thinking skills (Lipman, 2003).

The three methods, in different ways, help students find a voice through collaboration: reading circles open up ways to express personal reactions to texts; writing circles scaffold the stages of the writing process to produce written work; speaking and listening enable learners to hear each other and be heard, to question and be questioned, to think together and develop own ideas and answers. All three support learners clarify their own individual language difficulties to help them move forward in terms of word, text and sentence level accuracy and fluency; they open up group members to other points of view in an exchange of thinking and expression; and require co-operation, trust and respect to build teamwork. There must also be a willingness to learn by critically engaging with reading, writing and discussion.

Group interaction in the circle process makes conversation the focus of this research project. Circles concentrate on the benefits of conversation and what people can achieve together when they communicate on an equal footing, which seems to have been lost at the national and local policy level.

This chapter will now review the three types of circles. I will look for the key similarities and differences between them to guide the development of the integrated model.

Reading Circles

The standard classroom reading circle model was developed by Harvey Daniels (2002) in Chicago, USA, in elementary schools (for ages 6-11 years). Daniels' (ibid.) model, for native English speakers, established eleven 'key ingredients' for effective literature circles, including student choice in forming small peer-led discussion groups and enabling the different groups to choose different texts to read, with each member making notes to help them contribute ideas in their discussions.

Each group follows a reading schedule, with regular discussion meetings held at planned intervals as they progress through a book. When they finish the book, the circle members share highlights of their reading with their class. They then swap members with other groups, choose more reading, and move into a new cycle. This sets up informal and free-ranging discussions where there are no right or wrong answers, in contrast to the type of classroom instruction based on recalling facts.

Students are encouraged to engage with texts at higher levels of thinking; drawing inferences, forming hypotheses, making judgments, and supporting conclusions about what they read. They also take turns, build on other people's ideas, use specific passages in the book to support interpretations, and develop general discussion skills. Daniels sees this as setting 'goals harmonious not just with skill development but true lifelong reading', particularly when children are able to 'connect what they read to their own lives' (ibid., pp.5-7).

He notes that research in this field has been clouded by the fact that it is referenced under many names: literature circles, reading circles, literature studies, book clubs, literature discussion groups and co-operative book discussion groups, to name a few, and that the research often combines divergent areas such as teacher control versus student autonomy. However, there is a wide body of research which has shown educational and other benefits from reading circles, such as gains in test scores and reading comprehension alongside evidence of

increased enjoyment of and engagement in reading; expanded discourse opportunities; increased multicultural awareness and of other perspectives on social issues. This has applied to a range of young learners including inner-city students; adolescents in custody; 'resistant' learners; homeless children and children living in poverty; second-language learners; and those learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Daniels' (ibid.) model was the prototype for Mark Furr (2004) who understood that the literature circle method, being used for native English speakers in American schools, was combining intensive reading with extensive reading to promote greater reading fluency and discussion. Furr (ibid.) found a relevance in this from his experience of working in Japan, where literature education for EFL students at university was based on close reading of English texts in order to complete grammar translations into Japanese. However, the education-by-translation system lacked opportunities for students to develop reading fluency or greater comprehension. It also constrained the development of their discussion skills as there were few chances to engage in critical thinking and to have free conversations about the texts they were reading. This is an example of how educational policy decisions can restrict classroom practices, which in turn impose limits on the student experience and make it difficult for the learners to participate in conversations about their learning.

Furr (ibid.) recognised a need to amend some of Daniels' steps, in order to better support EFL learners who neither spoke English, nor read the Roman script, in their daily lives. Therefore, Daniel's (2002) original model was adapted to provide a stronger guiding role for the teacher in text choice and the make-up of discussion groups as shown below:

Daniel's 11 ingredients (2002, p.18)	Furr's model (2004, pp.4-5)
Students choose their own materials	Teachers select reading materials appropriate for their students.
Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.	Small temporary groups are formed, based on the teacher's discretion.
Different groups read different books	Different groups read the same text.
When books are finished, readers share with their classmates, and then form new groups around new reading.	When books are finished, readers may prepare a group project and/or the teacher may provide additional information to "fill in some of the gaps" in student understanding.
↓	↓
Both	
Groups meet on a regular, predictable schedule to discuss their reading.	
Students use written notes to guide both their reading and their discussion.	
Discussion topics come from the students.	
Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, including personal connections, digressions and open-ended questions.	
The teacher serves as a facilitator, not a group member or instructor.	
Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.	
A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.	

2.5 Reading circle models

The final idea that learning should be pleasurable is taken up in Duncan's discussion (2014) on formal facilitated groups for 'emergent' adult (aged 19+) readers: groups which are set up by someone, such as a teacher, for the benefit of the participants who are learning or developing their reading, including ESOL students.

Duncan (ibid.) reduces the reading circle model to five 5 criteria: There must be a written text; it must enable turn taking; it must be non-hierarchical; it must allow collaborative and peer teaching; and be based on discussion.

She also sees five key elements of reading: entertainment and escape; cognitive work and narrative creation; emotional stimulation; ethical contemplation; and companionship, which combine to create the possibility of intellectual, political and educative development through the pleasure of reading.

Duncan (ibid.) summarises the findings from the research fields of primary education, English language learning, adult literacy, and ethnographic and social history which indicate the types of development possible through the use of circles. These include tapping in to the historical tradition of group reading, thinking and talking; building reading comprehension, reading skills and practices, and identities as readers; fluency and vocabulary across reading, writing, speaking and listening; developing learner autonomy and collaborative learning; and the social skills needed for successful discussions. The latter offers particular support for the less confident, as circles provide a 'drive to speak' (ibid., p.19) to share the thoughts and opinions generated by a text. This drive is strong in an ESOL group made up, as it is, of many cultures, as there are many views to bring to any one text. Duncan explains:

the diversity is an important part of how any reading circle works, as members share their different perspectives and experiences. It fuels discussion and drives peer learning (ibid., p.24).

However, what is most apparent from Duncan (ibid.) is that the effectiveness of the circles method cannot be unpicked easily. There are many interlinked threads involved in how circles can support language development. Some of these developments can be neatly measured, such as by reading comprehension tests, but what is actually at work leading to literacy development appears to be less easy to identify and label. It could perhaps best be described as:

a complex process of *becoming*, involving a tightly interwoven bundle of practices, skills and confidences, and, crucially, that this process remains largely unknown or mysterious (ibid., p.4).

One of the 'mysterious' elements could be the connections readers make, such as those recognised by Daniels to 'connect what they read to their own lives' (2002, p.5.) Connections could be to a text - to a story or its characters - or with other circle members they discuss the text with – relating to their own and others' life experiences.

This builds on Duncan's (2012) earlier exploration of this theme where she discusses how a reading circle provides a safe outlet for the participants to talk about the personal issues they need to discuss in an indirect way - removing personal experiences to the text. In the reverse manner, an incident in the text may frame a personal connection.

This aspect in Duncan's work seems to have much to say about the personal identity of readers inasmuch as circle members 'seem to be expanding or exploring who they think they are, what they are capable of and what they think is important or valuable' (2014, p.43).

Carter offers an insight when he suggests that engaging with literature is a way of 'relating life with text, text with life, seeing the links' (2000, p.2). He considers that whilst a basic set of key skills can be developed via reading, it is also possible for readers to identify with and to develop wider understandings of the world they live in through encounters with fictional characters and situations (ibid., p.108). This is made all the more powerful when combined with small group discussions which promote reflection, autonomous feeling, thinking and expressing.

Duncan's analysis is that the TLA benefits of reading circles go beyond reading and have value in the development of writing, speaking and listening and social skills (2012, p.149).

The review of these authors point to certain common elements in reading circles:

- Works of fiction are used as learning stimuli.
- Readers make connections to the texts.
- Readers make connections with other people in their group.
- Reading provides a scaffold for the things readers want to express and discuss.
- The circle gives members confidence to speak in the trust that the group will listen to what is said.
- Members, not teachers, are mainly responsible for giving, receiving and acting on feedback.
- The circle method straddles reading for enjoyment and for reading literacy.

- The method highlights tensions between reading for fluency and self-expression versus accuracy and technical ability.
- The method encourages self-reflection and learner autonomy.

These are issues I will return to at the end of this section in order to identify some of the key similarities and differences between the different types of circles.

Writing Circles

The role of circles in the development of writing has been recorded by Sylvia Gunnery (2007). Gunnery's (ibid.) work is based on native English speakers in junior high (12-14 years) and senior high (15-18 years) schools in Canada. She reflects reading circle comments regarding the collaborative nature of circles, when she notes that 'in the early development of writers, much is gained by learning together and inspiring one another' (ibid., p.5).

The use of writing circles can benefit students by helping to build the confidence and resilience to write. It provides a starting point to address the initial blank page by building skills to generate and develop preliminary ideas for written work. Writing circles also develop awareness of different genres, writing purposes, styles and voice; matters of grammar, spelling and punctuation; revision and drafting skills; reading-writing connections; and speaking and listening skills.

Gunnery (ibid.) takes care to point out that when setting up a writing circle, teachers need to be aware that it takes time, perhaps 4 - 6 weeks, before students are clear about the workings of the method. Furr also recognises that circles require time and suggests that in reading circles 'a teacher must be willing to commit several stories and rounds of discussion if there are to be positive results' (2009, p.6).

Gunnery's circle model (2007, pp.8-10) can work at small-group or whole class levels. Small groups entail a number of circles operating simultaneously in one class, but may be focused on separate purposes. The teacher is responsible for determining six particular matters for both groupings:

	Small groups	Whole class
Numbers Class size Classroom size	the number of students in each circle depending on class size and individual student learning needs. the layout of the room to accommodate effective discussions.	
Time Specific tasks Ongoing projects	providing time for all students to participate.	a wider range of perspectives can be heard.
Topic	enabling students to direct their own learning, for example, by sharing work-in-progress and listening to responses.	focusing the lesson, for example, by introducing a new topic or including a mini-lesson on a key learning point.
Individual student support	randomly allocating students to circles so that those needing additional support can be more easily observed and assisted as required.	sharing learning and questions arising from small group work.
Personalities	managing the make-up of the circles to avoid confrontations.	
Comfort level	organising co-operative circles where students feel safe to share personal thoughts.	

2.6 Writing circle model

Gunnery (ibid.) emphasises that the teacher's role above all should be about listening, observing and assessing group work, with the careful use of explanations, prompt questions and encouragement to help conversations stay focused and move forward, leading to greater learner autonomy. Initially, it is the teacher who sets up the writing circle, choosing the groupings, texts and writing tasks but later the students should choose these things for themselves. Here she combines Daniels (2002), also working with first language English speakers, and Furr's (2004) EFL perspectives.

The common element linking the three authors is the use of circle roles to guide and support learning. The roles break the sum of reading and writing skills into separate, but interlinked, components. Students use the notes they make for their individual roles to build their group discussions. The roles are:

Daniels (2002)	Furr (2004)	Gunnery (2007)
Discussion Leader prepares general questions about the text, keeps everyone on topic and ensures that everyone has a chance to speak		
Summariser reads for the main characters and events and summarises the story	Time Keeper works within the time and lets everyone know how much time is remaining for the activity	
Connector looks for links between the text and daily life		
Word Master finds new, difficult or interesting vocabulary	Note Taker records a few notable ideas	
Passage Person looks for important paragraphs	Speaker reports notable ideas to the whole class	
Culture Collector looks for cultural similarities and differences between the text and daily life		
	Checker uses writing resources to check for correctness	
	Illustrator creates the images(s) for any displays	

2.7 Circle roles

In Daniels (ibid.) and Furr (ibid.), circle roles are used to encourage both close and wider reading outside of teacher-controlled class time to stimulate ideas for students to bring to a discussion in class. Gunnery's roles are to do with focusing students on the 'parameters set by the teacher' (2007, p.12) to achieve a given written task within a set timeframe. These roles relate to completing a task to a deadline, emphasise accuracy through the use of reference materials, such as encyclopaedias and dictionaries, and the clarity of thought and expression needed to report findings back to peers and to compose own written work.

For Gunnery (ibid.), the circles method provides time for the teacher to monitor students in order to identify individual and group learning strengths and needs, in conjunction with time for whole class and individual learning. It is then possible to supplement the circles with 'mini-lessons' to consolidate learning, as Furr (2004) also suggests to 'fill in some of the gaps' without compromising on the learner autonomy which is developing as students discuss matters together and come to independent decisions. This complements Duncan's (2014) view of the role diversity plays in ESOL classes, enabling learners to exchange different views as

a group which can influence individual thinking. Gunnery (2007) explains this when she notes that:

a personal view is expanded when an idea is expressed from another point of view, a deeper understanding of the writing process can be achieved when observing various examples and approaches (ibid., p.9).

The review of Gunnery (ibid.) points to certain similarities and differences in writing circles and reading circles:

- Time is required for students to become familiar with the circle method
- A fiction or non-fiction text can be used as a model for writing.
- Writers make connections to the model text read.
- Writers make connections with other people in their group.
- Reading and discussion provides a scaffold for the things members want to write.
- The circle gives members confidence to write in the trust that the group will read and respond to what is expressed.
- Members move towards being mainly responsible for giving, receiving and acting on feedback.
- The circle method straddles writing for enjoyment and for progression in writing skills.
- The method highlights tensions between writing for fluency and self-expression versus accuracy and technical ability.
- The method develops self-reflection, self-expression and learner autonomy.

I will return to these issues at the end of this section in order to identify some of the key similarities and differences between the different types of circles.

Speaking, Listening and Thinking Skills

The sharing of diverse opinions occurs when students talk together in their circle to discuss the reading text or writing task they are undertaking. This is the point where collaborative learning can take place. A useful way of looking at this learning is Lipman's 'Community of Enquiry' and its three 'dimensions of thinking' (2003, p.197).

Community of enquiry is a practical teaching method which aims to promote deeper thinking skills in students. It was first developed by Lipman in the 1970s from his own experience teaching at Columbia University, USA, where he found students were finding it difficult to reason for themselves. It has been taken forward in the UK by the Society for Advancing Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERE).

The method supports students move through Bloom's Cognitive Domain (1956, cited in Lipman, *ibid.*, p.39) from surface level knowledge of facts and information towards deeper learning in which they can apply, analyse, synthesise and evaluate information to inform their own decision making. Lipman (*ibid.*) achieves this by building thinking skills from three perspectives.

Firstly, it enables students to practise critical thinking by expressing and justifying their personal views on topics and to find out and question what others think. It encourages 'self-correction' (*ibid.*, p.197) as students, informed by what they learn from their peers, can amend and develop their own thoughts.

Secondly, the method opens participants up to creative thinking about new views on a topic and other ways to address problems. This lets students realise that there are more points of view and solutions to issues other than personal ones. This generates new ideas.

Thirdly, it promotes caring thinking. This is in regard to respecting the views of others and responding to them in a sensitive manner.

The community of enquiry process, as supported by SAPERE in the UK, began as 'Philosophy for Children' (P4C), but now includes colleges and communities. The method is used to promote philosophical enquiries in a range of educational settings using a 10-step enquiry model facilitated by a teacher (SAPERE, 2015):

Preparation	A starter activity or game to practise a thinking or community building skill and links to the starting point.
Presentation of starting point	A stimulus that is common, central and contestable - a shared issue or concern, the question is important in the lives of the students, and there is more than one valid point of view. Initially, the stimulus should be to engage students in

	the process, but as they become more familiar with the stages, it can be directly linked to the curriculum.
Thinking time	Time for individual reflection on the starting point. Students silently think of one or two 'big ideas' from the initial stimulus or via a think-pair-share activity.
First thoughts	A chance for students who want to say something to air their 'first thoughts' to the class. These can also be written down.
Formulation of questions	In groups of 4 or 5, students discuss the starting point and any questions it raises. They discuss any issues arising and formulate questions, from which they choose one to be put forward to the class.
Airing of questions	Questions, prominently displayed, are discussed, links made and ambiguities cleared up.
Selection (voting)	Students vote for questions they wish to pursue. A range of voting systems can be used - blind voting (eyes closed) eliminates peer influence; omnivote (multiple votes allowed) avoids students choosing just their own question.
First words	The group whose question is voted for by the class explain their rationale and their thoughts.
Building	The dialogue is opened to the class. The role of the facilitator is to challenge, clarify and encourage students to focus on the question and to constructively agree or disagree with peers, building towards better understanding of the issue(s) discussed.
Final words	A chance for students to say their final uncontested words on what has been discussed. Often those who haven't contributed during the session may do so here.

2.8 P4C 10-step enquiry model

The teacher closes with a review and evaluation of the session. By looking back at the session and considering how well the whole class and individuals did, the teacher-facilitator can use student feedback to decide upon a focus for the next session to improve.

The use of community of enquiry in education has been shown to widen curricula and student activity by engaging learners not just in course content but in interesting discussions based on philosophical ideas. The discussions allow all participants to have a voice and to learn together and from each other in a democratic fashion. The method follows a set structure to introduce the group, topic and stimulus, to provide time for thinking, forming, sharing and selecting questions and beginning and reviewing an enquiry before a final summary. The enquiry stimulus is designed to promote discussions which give opportunities to develop, challenge and record thinking.

The careful staging of the thinking and discussion process is similar to that of reading and writing circles. The inclusion of questions plays a similar role to that which Furr (2004) envisages for teachers who 'fill in some of the gaps'. Shirley Clarke (2001) also acknowledges the role questions play in learning as a means to 'close the gap between what they have done and what they could do' (ibid., p.56) when she writes about pupils in the primary classroom.

The use of both closed and open questions has a significant place in TLA. The first can be used to check and recall existing understanding and the latter can be used to move thinking 'beyond the literal' (ibid., p.87). This movement creates a much deeper effect than surface-level indicators of literacy with a combination of higher-order application, analytical, evaluation and synthesis questions used to stimulate higher-order thinking (ibid., pp.93-100). These questions are generally set by the teacher. However, Clarke also comments on the power of students' self-reflection as a way to share and learn from the thoughts, problems and successes of others, and to build self-esteem in learning ability (ibid., p.45). Independent action is also in Lipman's method (2003) as it is the learners who generate their own questions and thinking to bridge their gaps, particularly when these lead to self-correction.

Lipman was aware of weakness in his model (ibid., pp.5-6), which resonate with the modern-day teacher concerned with finding the time to plan, and space to fit, the community of enquiry into an already crowded curriculum. The development of deeper thinking skills in the classroom needs adequate time to show effects on learning, but time is in short supply when targets need to be met. Other pressures are about persuading staff the model is workable and credible, and providing them with appropriate training.

Some benefits of the community of enquiry include its ability to counter teaching to the test as it expands the focus from exams to include deeper learning. This gives tutors a role to help improve the learning experience for students beyond the latest government policy directive and provides an authentic democratic experience for participants (Coffield, 2010; Coffield and Williamson, 2011).

The models provided by Daniels (2002), Furr (2004; 2009) and Gunnery (2007) rest primarily on using fiction in the classroom in contrast to the non-fiction SfL materials. SfL is based on developing the skills ESOL learners need to carry out

transactions as the consumers and customers of services to fulfil general daily needs, such as making a doctor's appointment or going shopping. The learners are usually identified as stock characters required to ask for and give information, such as enquiring about education or work opportunities or making a complaint to a landlord. This overlooks the fuller range of human roles and emotions present in life and represented in fiction, and the learning opportunities they can provide. Lipman understands the idea of transaction, but related to the constant interconnected flow of communication between teachers, learners and self from critical, creative and caring angles in enquiries (2003, p.201).

Robert Fisher (2001) has seen that interconnections point to the collaborative nature of oral enquiries. Collaborative enquiry practice in schools has been shown to lead to real gains in reading skills and self-confidence. There is also evidence of improvements in writing and that the activity itself can be enjoyable and motivating for students (Teachers TV, 2005). This seems to support the idea that circles can provide an integrated skills intervention as they include the language modes of reading, writing and speaking and listening.

The combination of teacher-led and student-managed activities in the 10-step P4C enquiry procedure is another way to look at different types of autonomy support. The opportunity to think in critical, caring and creative ways is made possible in a collaborative exercise based on guiding principles that recall dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2007). These include participants knowing that their discussions are undertaken with their recognised community (circle) in order to delve purposefully into a subject matter to share different perspectives. Lipman (2003) understands, like Sennett (2018) and Burbules (2007), that this does not mean always reaching a final consensus but can mean learning from other points of view to move your own ideas along. In this way, students may 'recognize how before that acquisition they had even less' (Lipman, 2003, p.86). Stefanou *et al.* (2004) comment how this social construction of understanding supports autonomy as 'students learn how to take other's perspectives – to see how their own ideas can be enriched and enhanced by the thoughts of others' (*ibid.*, p.107).

Lipman's (2003) type of childhood classroom experience can build group and individual capabilities as thinkers. It differs from circles, as although the P4C teacher organises the procedures and facilitates students to freely discuss and

think, they hold tighter responsibility for guiding the structure of the conversation from the first thoughts to the final summary. The sequencing of the steps is like a mental workout programme to build sound and strong ways of thinking towards independent thinking for school pupils with the teacher as the team coach. Within a circle, discussion takes place in a looser forum where the teacher monitors from the sidelines, intervening when called upon to clarify a sticking point, or to help rescue a faltering discussion.

The review of community of enquiry points to certain similarities and differences with reading circles and writing circles:

- Time needs to be made available on schemes of work
- The initial stimulus could be fiction or non-fiction but does not have to be a written text.
- Thinkers make connections to the stimulus.
- Thinkers make connections with other people in their group.
- The stimulus and discussion provide a scaffold for thinking.
- The community gives members confidence to voice opinions, ask questions and give answers in the trust that the group will listen and respond to what is expressed.
- Members, not teachers, are mainly responsible for giving, receiving and acting on feedback.
- The community straddles thinking as a means of appreciating different texts, tasks and conversations as activities to be enjoyed and for progression in oracy.
- The method develops multi-dimensional thinking for self-reflection, self-expression and for promoting learner autonomy.

Common circle themes

Some clear similarities and differences have emerged from the reviews of the reading circle, writing circle and community of enquiry methods. These are summarised below:

	Reading Circles	Writing Circles	Community of Enquiry
Time	Space is in needed in the curriculum Students need method training time		
Stimulus	Printed fiction texts	Printed fiction or non-fiction texts	Printed, audio or visual fiction or non-fiction texts; or objects
Students	Voice as readers	Voice as writers	Voice as thinkers
Connections	To texts With group	To texts and tasks With group	To texts, tasks and objects With group
Scaffold	Texts and group	Texts, tasks and group	Texts, tasks, objects and group
Feedback	From group members, supplemented by teacher		
Potential outcomes	Reading for enjoyment and reading skills	Writing for enjoyment and writing skills	Speaking, listening and thinking for enjoyment and reading, writing and oracy skills
	fluency and accuracy learner autonomy		

2.9 Common circle themes

Despite reading circles, writing circles and community of enquiry having much in common, they also have their own unique elements. The types of stimulus used within each model vary. Teacher-led activities are directed to discrete language skills in the main, which means that the potential outcomes lean towards accuracy in specific language skills. It is entirely possible to use one approach without overt cross-over to another: reading stays in the realm of reading, writing in writing and speaking and listening in talking. However, none of the models can work effectively without students discussing what they *think* about the things they are reading, writing or talking about and this provides scope to draw in and on the other methods to extend the language and other learning opportunities present in each of the approaches.

One overriding theme which is emerging as a constant in reading circles, writing circles and community of enquiry is that of **connection**. Participants first need to connect to the text or task by finding links to their own experience in terms of topic, characters or events for example. They then need to feel secure in their group to be confident to share their findings – they need to build friendships and connect with other people. Next, they need to consider if they can connect to the ideas

their circle friends express and how to incorporate this new thinking into their own understandings. This process leads to connecting own and shared understandings to the completion of a new piece of work, such as a reading experience or an oral or written task.

A second overarching theme is the how the methods can potentially work in a **dual fashion**. One facet is the traditional teaching concern with language accuracy such as spelling, punctuation and grammar in order to produce coherent language. The other is to do with fluency where language is used to articulate thoughts, feelings and ideas allowing for self-expression in such a way that others can recognise the truths in it.

A third key element is **self-reflection**. An integral part of all three methods is the time and space given to think about and share thoughts, opinions and knowledge, to consider in which ways your own are similar or different to other people's and what you can learn from that. This gradual building and re-building of what you think and what you know can be about language matters and views of the world.

Self-reflection is tied to a fourth aspect in circles which encourages **learner autonomy** in terms of language use and independent thinking. This is made possible as participants become better able to identify their own areas for development in both social understandings and language skills and then take action for self-improvement. These developments can be either in concepts of the world around us or in practical actions to tackle individual language learning issues.

Circles seem to require these central elements in order to be effective.

Conversation is at the heart of the methods. A circle advances when an idea is shared, freely discussed, and developmental feedback is given. These aspects combine together to let students use their **voice** to explain, question and debate matters of language, life and learning which increases with **self-confidence**.

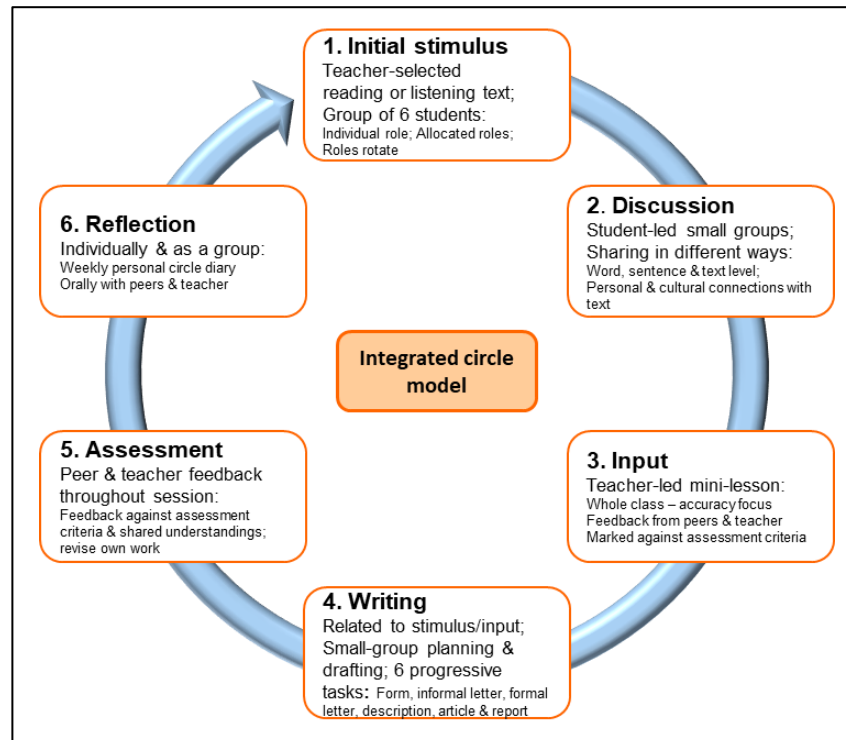
The issue of voice reappears here in recognition of the dual use of circles to potentially develop language accuracy and fluency, and the dual perspectives of second language learning which have influenced the development of ESOL in the UK. Some view conversation as a form of communication based on a few simple

skills. In this view, language skills can be neatly boxed up and presented in a uniformed structure such as the AECC or awarding bodies' assessment criteria. This technical approach is akin to the way the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic were traditionally seen. It puts language within a central government model as a set of necessary skills. These are all that are necessary in order for a person to be linguistically competent for education and employment prospects.

An alternative view presents a more grounded version of language. It understands that people speak and write, because they have a strong need to communicate something. Their message is more important than how they say it. This approach highlights that language cannot be so easily packaged up because it is expressed by many different people, in many different ways. This approach shifts the emphasis away from the technical process of correctness and function towards the human element where there is space for people to say the things they want and need to say. Space like this can be found in circle conversations.

Towards an integrated circle

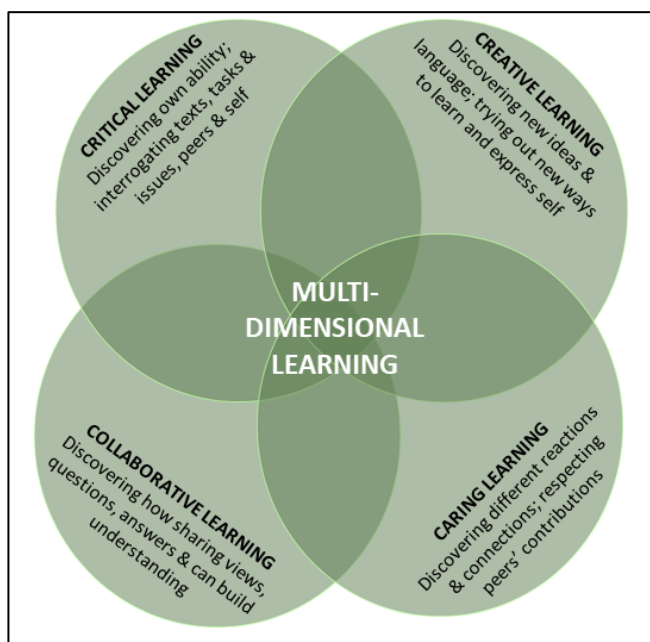
Taking the similarities and differences between reading circles, writing circles and community of enquiry into account, it may be possible to create an integrated circle model, using a stimulus to initiate thinking and as a springboard for small group discussions. The discussions are based on the use of interconnected roles. Conversation is used to extend thinking and to scaffold writing. An agreed feedback criteria develops accuracy in reading, writing and speaking and listening skills. The model under investigation is:



2.10 Integrated circle model

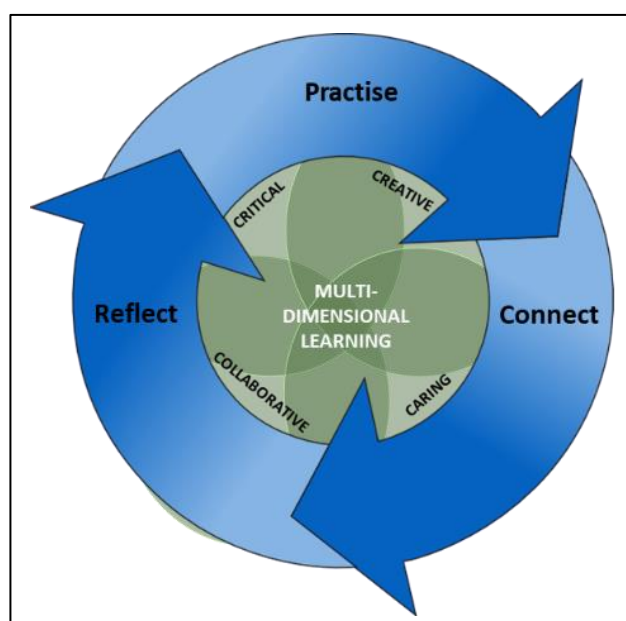
The glue that holds the approach together is the use of structured activities in democratic group work. The groups are organised with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the individual members, but they are not hierarchical. All members of a group are essential for building an understanding of a text, task or issue from separate aspects into a whole. In concert, the three circle methods draw on multi-dimensions of learning through working together in a community of discovery.

It can be useful to illustrate this via Lipman's concept of multi-dimensional thinking in which the separate but equal modes of critical, caring and creative thinking interconnect to create a more rounded understanding (2003, p.200). When combined with Fisher's (2001) collaborative thinking, the result creates a vision of interconnected circles that support more comprehensive understandings than that which could be achieved by a student working alone. A circle, which integrates the three ESOL language modes, could interconnect learning thus:



2.11 Multi-dimensional learning in integrated circles

These dimensions of learning set up a cycle of **group practise** using the roles provided by reading circles and writing circle structures to approach an initial stimulus, of students making and discussing **personal connections** and then **reflecting** on what they have learnt, or need to learn, from their own discoveries and peer feedback to put into **individual practise**. Individual tasks are then assessed by a teacher against the shared assessment criteria and reviewed by the student, before a new stimulus is introduced and the cycle repeats. The intention is to move learning forward by building on the discoveries made from previous circles. It is a cumulative approach, represented by the following diagram:



2.12 Learning cycle in integrated circles

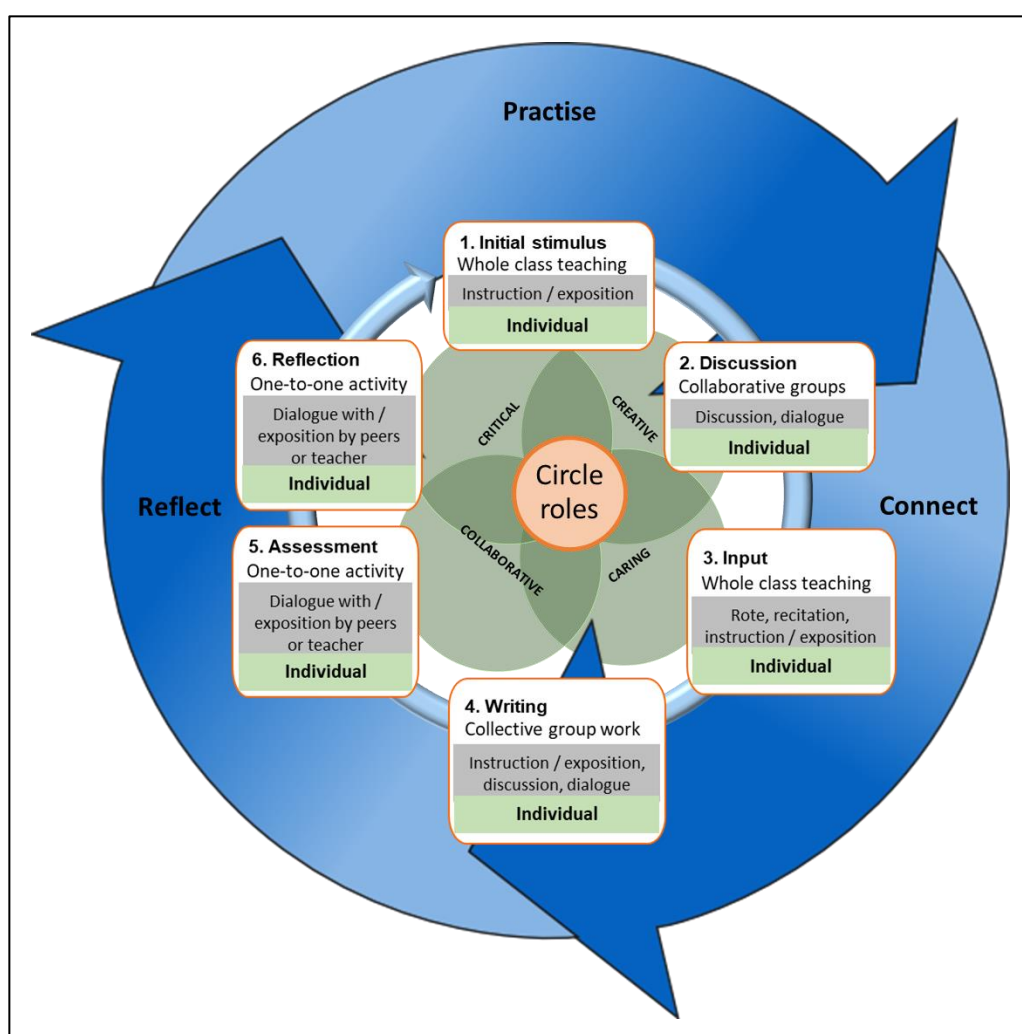
A cumulative approach, by definition, is one that requires time. Time is required predominately for TLA, but also to establish the circles method within the college's ESOL curriculum and culture, and the political assumptions which underpin current policy.

Drawing together the elements from the key authors referred to in this literature review, a method is emerging which builds on previous research in reading circles, writing circles, community of enquiry and dialogic teaching, to create a combined TLA approach for ESOL learners. The integrated circle responds to the need to provide ESOL learning in a SfL policy context with its concerns for employability and integration, and to enable teachers to use their own professional expertise to offer engaging education which is as much about student enjoyment and personal fulfilment as meeting policy restrictions.

Ultimately, an integrated circle is a TLA process which can be used to support students on their learning journey towards language independence, to open employment opportunities and ways to contribute to the economy and society, with a communication-centred, learner-focused approach. An integrated circle is multi-layered and multi-dimensional. It should be rich and work because students take the lead in developing their language abilities together through discussion and dialogue based on their personal connections to learning stimuli. The students direct where learning is focused as the teacher's role is to listen to the students' conversations to identify and respond to their language learning needs. All participants – students and teacher – ground accuracy work on a shared and agreed assessment criteria, and fluency on supported risk-taking: freedom to experiment with language to express self with the safety of group support. It is also a democratic space which challenges the participants to be accountable for their ways of thinking when they present their findings, views and opinions to their circle.

The concept of an integrated circle speaks to Robin Alexander's discussion of what contributes to good pedagogical practice (2004). The stages of the integrated circle model extend Alexander's (2015; 2017) organisation and teaching talk repertoires to more independent and autonomous work.

The principles of the circle TLA method align closely with the principles of dialogic teaching in the way it is collective - learning together; reciprocal - learning by sharing ideas; supportive - learners can express themselves safely with peer support; cumulative – learners link own ideas and questions with those of others to develop coherent thinking; and purposeful - with specific educational purpose (Alexander, 2017, p.38). A circle, like dialogic teaching, is a method which can ‘harness the power of talk to engage [students], stimulate and extend their thinking, and advance their learning and understanding’ (ibid., p.37). The diagram below summarises dialogic interaction and communication within the stages of a circle:



2.13 Dialogic interaction and communication in integrated circles

Key aspects of circles

The review of Furr (2004; 2009), Gunnery (2007), Lipman (2003) and Alexander (2004; 2015; 2017) has pointed to several key aspects across reading circles,

writing circles and communities of enquiry which all appear to need. The central elements are:

Time

A circle is a long-term process. It requires commitment from the institution, teachers and students in order to create the conditions to support positive language learning results. This has implications for schemes of work, timetabling, lessons planned and individual progress.

The role of the teacher

The teacher's role, or the role of teaching, is shared in the circle class. The teacher retains the traditional role of planning and organising each session, of introducing topics, language points and tasks, but once the circle discussion is underway steps back into a facilitator's role. In the circle, the students have a key role to play in the teaching element of the process. Collaborative activities enable those with more developed language skills to offer examples, advice or corrections to their lower-level peers. This is where we find room for Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (1978). Both students and teachers provide feedback or assessment for learning.

Stimuli

A circle discussion relies on a stimulus. There is a particular preference for fiction but it could also be non-fiction texts, audios, images or objects. The stimulus borrows from community of enquiry with a theme which is common, central and contestable for the students. This generates the discussion on the basis of a shared issue or a question, and for which there is more than one valid point of view.

Roles: instruction and note-taking sheets

A language learning circle for ESOL students breaks the learning process down into smaller, more manageable elements through the use of roles. Each role requires a student to find specific language points or connections in a text. Students are guided by instructions on individual role sheets. These also serve as a place to make notes to prepare for circle discussions. Roles are allocated by the teacher who ensures these are rotated around the circle group on a text-by-text basis.

Firstly, the use of rotating roles ensures students are presented with different activities in each circle to combat boredom and retain enthusiasm. Secondly, the roles allow students to focus on specific points without becoming overwhelmed by trying to comprehend an entire text. Some roles deal with surface-level accurate literacy skills such as spelling, punctuation and grammar, but these are combined with working towards the deeper skills that fluent language users adopt automatically such as inference.

The roles provide a reason to read the stimulus text and to think. This provides an avenue for discussion as the thinking raises questions which require answers, and may prompt further thinking and the sharing of wider ideas. The combination of reading, thinking, discussing and sharing ideas can support students produce their own follow-up related written tasks. Learning throughout relates partly to the language points of a stimulus, and also to individual connections (Furr, 2009).

Connections to text, people and task

Initial connections made via the circle process are those students make with the stimulus text. These connections may be how readers relate to text themes, actions and events or characters. In the thinking stage they may find other connections to their own life experiences or those of friends, relations or events they have heard of in the news or come across in other stories. In the discussion, they may find connections with other students. The desire to share experience, either of the stimulus task directly or of the realisation of connections, encourages discussion and the 'drive to speak' (Duncan, 2014), particularly when the students are working with a group they trust. A supportive atmosphere is necessary to encourage the sharing of ideas, especially for less confident speakers. The same drive can be the catalyst for facing the blank page when writing.

Scaffolding

If we are to ask ESOL students to undertake the challenging work of processing texts and talking about them in serious ways before converting this growing knowledge into written form, we must support the learners at each stage.

Examples of how to provide scaffolding include graded stimulus texts and writing tasks at the correct level and exemplars to be used as models. Group discussion work helps to 'close the gap' (Clarke, 2001) with relevant sources of information

and reference such as English-English dictionaries and coloured highlighters for individuals to mark texts with personally significant language points at word, sentence or text levels.

An element of this is in the recording of students' ideas and main discussion points to provide a reference to aid future work. In the community of enquiry model, first thoughts and questions aired can be written down by a nominated scribe. This can translate in the integrated model with students noting down the key findings from their circle group to exchange with another group, or the teacher could record feedback in open class and issue copies to all participants.

Expanding learning

Opportunities to capitalise on the learning that takes place can be in the form of extension activities. As follow-up tasks to circle work, Furr suggests that teachers can deliver mini-presentations on authors, cultural or historical points or topic vocabulary from the texts and discussions (2009, p.22), and for the integrated version it would also include key language structures. This gives rise to the 'mini-session' where a teacher reinforces and clarifies a language area in preparation for a controlled task. This kind of instruction-exposition supports the linked writing task and is a further example of scaffolding.

Reflection for self-evaluation

Personal reflections are an integral part of the circle process. Therefore, I imagine the teacher will want to encourage her students to record their own thoughts about their individual circle experiences and language development. Gunnery (2007) supplies a range of photocopiable classroom sheets suitable for this purpose and advocates the keeping of a personal writing journal. The purposes of these are to record at least 'one significant point from their discussions' for personal development (*ibid.*, p.27), and which the teacher can use to inform future lesson planning.

This type of reflection practice links with Clarke's (2001) discussion of pupil self-evaluation. Clarke notes that it 'opens doors' (*ibid.*, p.45) which enable students to become aware of their own individual learning needs. Further, teachers are able to access, and respond to, what students' are thinking about their own learning. This is particularly powerful if the reflections are linked to shared learning intentions and

success criteria as this can lead to developments in a learner's 'progress, persistence and self-esteem' (ibid., p.40).

The literature, therefore, provides some useful guidance for the creation of an integrated circles pedagogy in an ESOL context. However, there are some aspects of Furr (2009), Gunnery (2007), Lipman (2003) and Alexander (2017) which do not appear so relevant to the integrated circle considered here. The elements which are less likely to appear include the following:

Stimuli

Community of enquiry enables a wide range of material to be used as initial stimuli. This includes the use of pictures and objects. These are unlikely to feature prominently in the integrated circle as they do not provide explicit examples in printed form of the reading or writing skills necessary for exams. However, there may be a place for these in extension activities to help scaffold related discussions, thereby linking to speaking and listening skills.

Role badges

Furr has created a set of icons to be used as badges (2009, p.40) which circle members can wear to signify their role within the discussion. Badges can help the learners more easily identify which role their peers are undertaking, but could also reduce opportunities for students to engage in talk as they clarify their roles and commence their groups.

Submitting work

A circle rests on roles. These bring different conversation elements to the discussion. One concern is that if students have not completed their roles, they will be unable to participate in a meaningful discussion about the text. An answer to this is to require absent students to submit their completed work for another student to read aloud to the group (ibid, p10). The issue here is the demand this may place on those adult ESOL students who have the most complicated lives and whose time is already stretched the thinnest. Might they leave their course if the pressure is too great? How feasible is it for an absent student to make arrangements to meet a classmate and handover their work? This might be easier for some than others. Would it be fairer to all participants if the circle were run with those present, meaning the teacher would need to re-organise groupings and

make use of plenary feedback to 'fill the gaps' of roles not represented when students are absent?

Student choice: texts, roles and tasks

If we follow the line of argument that all roles need to be represented, then someone needs to retain the overview of the class and this is generally the teacher's role. The teacher usually manages who does what and when.

This is not to say that students should be excluded from having input into their lessons, but it is the teacher who will have the wider view on the teaching and learning in need. In the integrated model under investigation, it is the teacher who chooses the reading texts, circle roles, circle discussion groupings and writing tasks.

The option for students to choose these things for themselves may not be as applicable at this stage where the dynamics of the circle method and language skills are newly-developing. It would take time before any such decisions could be transferred over.

Expansion tasks: roles and further activities

Circle roles do not have to be limited to the six suggested for the integrated model. Another potential role includes an illustrator (Gunnery, 2007). This may be useful for art students or for artistic students, but perhaps not for direct language learning.

Other tasks such as poster sessions, plot pyramids and mini-presentations by students on text backgrounds and authors could be extremely interesting (Furr, 2009, p.20). They can help with independent study such as research skills and presentation techniques. These are undoubtedly essential for future education and/or employment, yet a necessity of this project is the available timeframe. It will not be possible to investigate every possible variance of circle work in the time available so hard decisions need to be made as to what to include and what to exclude for this iteration.

In the final analysis, I am responsible for, and to, my students as part of a SfL course. Although I imagine there may be possibilities to widen the scope of

teaching and learning to bring in other stimulating materials and activities, I have to maintain a balance with the institution's instructional requirements. I am responsible for helping students with their English language learning for their immediate daily life and for their future aspirations which will almost certainly depend on exam results. Therefore, it is inevitable that the project will have to limit the options to those aspects which have the most direct link to assessment criteria. This leads on to how we might imagine this kind of circle, under such constraints, might look.

An integrated circle imagined

Drawing together the themes from the different circle approaches indicates ways in which to think about the planning of ESOL sessions yet to be taught. It suggests ways in which a teacher might go about preparing a class to ensure that reading and writing tasks are designed to stimulate thinking, with student-led conversations integral to the learning process. At the same time, the teacher will need to be conscious of the requirements of the scheme of work as mapped to SfL, and the exam assessment criteria, where direct teacher input is needed to ensure the required official learning takes place.

Thinking about how these lessons might look for adult E3 ESOL students, based on the literature of Furr (2009) and Gunnery (2007), I am aware that the students will need at the very minimum one preparation session to become familiar with the circle roles and activities. This is necessary to lead up to a full integrated circle and allows me to imagine how an initial circle session might run and how it could be developed in further sessions, where the discussion work draws on Lipman (2003) and Alexander (2017). These sessions will need to be designed in line with the institution's timetable for ESOL classes. Each 3-hour class takes place once a week.

Imagined session 1: Introducing a circle

The teacher is in her classroom at 8.45am on a Monday morning. She has set up the resources she will need to present the idea of circles to her group. This is a new style of teaching and learning for the class, so she knows she has to introduce the concept of circles before any circle activity can begin. It might take a leap of faith by all participants to replace the traditional overt role of the teacher with a more student-led approach to ESOL.

The students arrive for 9.00am. The teacher greets and settles her class, takes the register, returns and clarifies marked work, collects homework and deals with queries, and other such matters which arise at the start of a typical session.

Furr (2009, pp.7-9) sets out clear steps to follow to introduce circles to a class. These illustrate what a circle is and explain what teachers and students are required to do.

Prior to this introductory session, the teacher would have researched and selected appropriate texts for the class. Appropriate in ESOL terms means using graded texts which students find manageable without relying on a dictionary. The texts will form the stimulus for each circle.

The circle steps continue with the teacher organising the class into groups of six. Each group should contain one or two confident students. These groups will become the first circle groups.

Next, the teacher issues a complete set of the six role sheets. The role sheets should be produced on A4 paper so that there is space for students to write their own notes during this introductory session.

The session will introduce each of the roles, one at a time. The role sheets will have been developed by merging Furr's (ibid.) reading circle roles with elements of Gunnery's (2007) writing circle roles. This is to encourage the dual possibilities of language fluency and accuracy. Each role also requires two ways of working: independent work for individual thinking and note-taking to complete the allocated role sheet, and group discussions. The roles and work are set out in the table below:

Role title	Role description	
	Independent / Individual	Group
Discussion Leader	To find the key theme, topic and ideas in the text. To write one question for each of the other roles.	To start the discussion by explaining the theme, topic or ideas in the text. To explain why you think that is important. To ask your questions. To make sure

		everyone joins in the discussion.
Summariser	To find the key characters and events of the text.	To use your notes to tell your group a short summary of the text. To explain why the points are important to understand the text. To ask your group what they think the key points are.
Passage Person	To find important, difficult or interesting paragraphs or sections which may be about the ordering of information, sequencing phrases, important information about the topic, characters or events or any other ideas you have about the paragraphs which help you understand the text.	To read the key paragraphs to the group. To ask the group one or two questions about each paragraph.
Word Master	To find 5 key words or phrases that you think are important for this text.	To tell your group the words or phrases you found. To explain what they mean. To explain why you think they are important for the text.
Feature Marker	To find the most important language features such as layout, images, charts and text formatting and punctuation marks.	To tell your group the language features and punctuation marks you found. To explain why they are used. To explain why you think they are important for the text.
Connector	To look for connections between the text and life which may be about your daily experiences and routines or culture and traditions. To look for similarities and differences between the text and real life.	To tell the group about the connections. To ask for questions or comments. To ask the group if they can think of any other connections.

2.14 Integrated circle roles

This session imagines that after each role is introduced time would be given for the students to discuss what they have heard and to ask questions in open class. Answers would be welcomed from peers and the teacher.

At this stage, the students have been introduced to the six circle roles. Now they are given the opportunity to choose the one they feel most confident with. This will

be the role they try as their first attempt. The teacher issues new, blank copies of the chosen role sheets with a short reading text. Students read the text and complete their notes individually in class to practise the process with peer and teacher support on hand. Then there is a short practise discussion to experience the type of talk for sharing ideas (Lipman, 2003) and teaching and learning (Alexander, 2017) generated in circles.

This class, imagined solely on the basis of the circle literature reviewed above, closes with the teacher issuing a new reading text and a blank role sheet to each student. The students will take on the same role as the one they practised in class today. This is homework and will form the basis of the first discussion meeting in the next session. The teacher will start a record of the circle schedule: dates, text titles and roles undertaken.

Imagined session 2: The first circle

A week later on Monday at 8.45am the teacher is back in the classroom awaiting her students. She has come prepared with extra copies of the reading text and role sheets set as homework last week for those who forget to bring it to this class.

The students arrive. After the routine greetings and settling at the start of the session, the teacher initiates the circle discussion meeting.

Furr (2009) suggests the discussion should last no longer than 30-40 minutes. This timing is sufficient for all six roles to be presented, for follow-up questions and comments and to prevent students losing motivation for this discussion and future circle sessions.

The teacher's role is the facilitator: to monitor and support the discussion only as necessary such as to restart a faltering conversation. The students have completed their role sheet notes, are aware of their role responsibilities and are free to generate and guide the topics for discussion. The roles provide a scaffold to learn about reading for different purposes and from different perspectives, and to promote fluency via informal conversations about texts.

After the discussion, the students share their key findings with other groups in the class and a reference record is made and issued. Next, there is a 'mini-lesson'.

From the reading circle literature, this might be a word focus activity to highlight key vocabulary in the text. It could be a story focus activity which models close-reading skills and tests comprehension (Furr, 2009).

A mini-lesson following writing circle procedures (Gunnery, 2007) could focus on genre layout, register, paragraphing or punctuation. There would be a focus on 'correctness' and accuracy.

The students are given time to record their immediate personal reflections on their circle journal page. They will take this home so that ideas which arise later can be added.

A writing task is set for homework. This task will be based on the general topic of the stimulus text and to provide practice in one of the writing assessment text types: form, informal letter, formal letter, article, description or report.

Imagined session 3: Reviewing circle work

It's the third Monday and it's 9.00am. The students enter the classroom and hand in their journals.

The teacher recaps the language point raised in last week's mini-lesson. She follows this up with extension activities to consolidate the language point. This takes about 1 hour.

Students sit in pairs and talk about their experience of the homework task. They show each other what they have accomplished and help each other spot errors or mistakes. They recall learning from the extension activities or call on the teacher for help and advice as needed. This activity is based on meeting the task 'parameters' (Gunnery, 2007) through collaboration. This takes about 30 minutes.

The remaining lesson time is for students to redraft their homework. They check their amended work with their partner and teacher. They might need to make some more amendments before they hand it in for marking against the assessment criteria.

The teacher recaps the six circle roles and explains that this week the students will be moving on to another of the circle roles. The roles should rotate each week so the student who completed the Discussion Leader's role this week, would act as the Summariser next week, and the Passage Person the following week, and so on. The students will choose and agree their next circle role. The principle here is to change the focus and activity so that students remain interested in the circle method and to enable them to bring 'fresh perspectives' (Furr, 2009, p.12) each week.

The teacher issues a new text and a role sheet for a new circle role. The reading and note-sheet will be completed as homework and discussed next week. And so the circle will continue to move on until all students have completed all six roles. The teacher will update the circle schedule record of dates, text titles and roles undertaken.

The last 10-15 minutes of the session includes instant reflection of the session, homework and queries are clarified. A journal sheet is also given to each student for deeper reflections which might come after the class.

Imagining alternative sessions

Furr's (2009) circle is based on reading texts, but writing circles (Gunnery, 2007) and community of enquiry (Lipman, 2003) indicate that other types of texts can be used. The teacher might choose to start the circle based on a listening text or writing task. She might then use the next session to focus on reading activities. This could give flexibility in how the sessions are stitched together:

Session	Homework	Next session	Homework
Reading	Writing	Writing	Reading
Listening	Reading	Reading	Writing
Writing	Reading	Listening	Writing

2.15 Framework for integrated circle sessions

Listening could also feature as homework with audios accessible from web links. Speaking is not included as the specific focus of any session as it is automatically incorporated in the circle discussions.

Conclusion

This chapter has set out a theoretical overview for circles by looking at definitions of autonomy, models of education, models of conversation and its potential role in circles. It has reviewed aspects of national policy as they impact on the local ESOL context and circles. It has also considered different circle methods and proposed a possible working model for an integrated process.

I have discovered that ESOL pedagogy can either be enhanced or constrained by the changing focus of national policy, particularly related to immigration, economic and social cohesion strategies. Teachers need to be flexible and creative with their classroom techniques in order to navigate changes in national criteria, in particular how national priorities feed into curriculum content and also focus on skills and exam results as the authorised evidence of learning.

The circle method may offer a creative solution for teachers trying to balance the demands of policy with the real life needs of students. This current research was initially prompted by a growing realisation from previous projects that the success of reading and writing circles could lie in the discussion aspect of the method. This prompted the research focus of conversation in circles.

A message is developing out of the review of relevant literature that the function of oracy seems to be based in the types of conversation that take place in circles in which participants give feedback on their own findings, directed by their allocated role. Circle roles provide a structure for reading selected texts which initiates individual thinking for the group discussion. The discussion, in turn, scaffolds related writing tasks.

The discussion provides time and space for participants to share and learn from each other at word, sentence or text-level, and from the personal connections they make to the stimulus material and group members. The reading texts, writing tasks and self-reflection may impact on ESOL from both bottom-up and top-down levels. The method works in a way which is student-led, democratic and participatory which can draw together reading, writing, speaking and listening and thinking in groups and as individuals supporting opportunities for cognitive autonomy.

This method of learning can provide a supportive, enjoyable and creative atmosphere in which to develop language skills for their own sake as much as for

exams. It is also possible to build relationships and respect for others and to broaden world knowledge, to be curious and think carefully about the world around us. There are opportunities to practise turn-taking, listening with respect, critical thinking and questioning, to be responsible for working both independently and as part of a team, recognising similarities and accepting differences. It is a place where participants can demonstrate their communication skills, personal work ethic and an ability to get on with others.

However, we must remain sensitive to the fact that when groups of people come together there is always room for disagreement and dissatisfaction. It is not always possible to come to a happy consensus and it is impossible to ever fully understand another's innermost thoughts, feelings and life experience. Sometimes we have to deal with conflicting views and make room for difference. We must also be aware that we can never truly 'know' other people, only our own interpretations of the things they say and their meanings.

Circle participants require the ability to get on with others in order to learn with others but they also need to be able to deal with difference and ambiguity. These are useful skills for the classroom, the world of work and as members of a cohesive society. The matter now will be to place the integrated circles concept within a concept of educational research.

Chapter 3: Methodology and methods

Introduction

Ways of inquiring into what is happening, and what can and should be done, is conceptualised in a number of different research methodologies. These methodologies are often referred to as 'paradigms' (Kuhn, 1970, cited in Scott and Usher, 1996). They provide the structured approach to collecting data that can be analysed to draw out findings relating to issues under investigation. Research paradigms stake out routes that can be followed to investigate issues of concern and set out pathways of discovery. They are commonly divided into three contrasting types. The first two are quantitative and qualitative traditions and the third is a critical reaction against them.

Quantitative research is generally linked to positivism. It can be seen in natural science and scientific methods which are long-respected means of discovering knowledge, such as understanding the mathematical ways in which the universe works. This method of research calls for careful experimentation and observation to produce laws and theories built on assumptions which have been tested to be 'true', and can be universally applied. The resulting body of theoretical knowledge is developed by impartial and neutral researchers, standing 'outside' of the research question.

Qualitative research is generally linked to the constructivist paradigm.

Developments in the field of social science questioned the suitability of natural science to explain human experience. It is argued that because human talk and action takes place in a rich social context they are phenomena that are not the same as materials tested using positivist methods in a laboratory. It also questioned objectivity and how researchers can isolate themselves from the influence of their social context and personal values. This model makes use of interpretations to illustrate and illuminate the conditions under investigation. This provides 'an element of truth' which may only partially translate to similar situations. The resulting body of knowledge is built on practice, and reflections of practice, by those actively involved and 'inside' the research question.

Critical theory helps to clarify the qualitative approach in its challenge of the quantitative view of research by criticising its effects. Critical theorists see quantitative effects as being about the maintenance of the status-quo. This includes who is deemed qualified to undertake research, who should have access to the information and who benefits from the knowledge created.

The matter for this chapter is to consider which paradigm will be most useful for evaluating integrated circles. The first part of this chapter draws on the work of Scott and Usher (ibid.) to navigate research traditions and where the key themes of this research project align with, or diverge from, the different theories.

Part 1: Research traditions

Quantitative research tradition

There is an enduring view of good educational research as working in a positivist/empiricist tradition. This requires a systematic, rigorous and methodical approach to specific research questions in order to produce generalisations which can be replicated, and applied more widely, in order to be valid.

This model took hold during the 'The Enlightenment' of the late 17th- and 18th-century, emphasising reason and the 'scientific' method as the primary sources of authority and legitimacy. Tradition and traditional understandings were replaced by rational thought as the source of knowledge. Rationality could be evidenced in the 'sense-experience gained through observation and experimentation...since it seemed to follow that only through this kind of investigation and the 'certainty' it provided could the resulting knowledge claims be considered valid' (ibid., p.11).

The ontological perspective is one where knowledge exists as factual evidence which can be discovered by the careful observer. This relates to the epistemological view that knowledge must be tested and measured through observation and experimentation by a neutral observer in a 'scientific' mode to uncover 'truths' (ibid., pp.11-18).

This view developed from research in natural sciences, which created the conditions to see research methods as 'a 'technology', as simply a set of methods,

skills and procedures applied to a defined research problem' (ibid., p.9). The 'technology' is imbued with key characteristics which have been traditionally accepted as 'good grounds' for research. These characteristics include an impartial objective researcher, the use of observation and analysis of data in systematic and methodical ways following logical rules of inference and confirmation, leading to valid knowledge claims. These claims include descriptions to establish what is happening/happened, explanations of the cause and generalisations to account for the findings (ibid, pp.9-18). It establishes a process in which the researcher is often identified as the person in a white lab coat, watching what is happening whilst making careful notes: a person who steps back to carefully observe experiments in a neutral and detached fashion. This is related to Dewey's 'spectator' view of knowledge and the quantitative research tradition (Boyles, 2006).

This has been a fruitful way to undertake research for those aspects of our lives which require understandings of quantities and measurements, calculations and probabilities such as automation, finance, construction and medical science. Such areas of life require an accuracy from the quantitative data collected and analysed in order to establish consistent findings and outcomes which can be applied to, controlled and replicated in settings beyond that of the specific research context.

This type of methodology can be helpful for this circles research project in relation to matters which can be counted. This might reveal how the circles method can improve the aspects of ESOL language learning which can be measured, such as assessment results.

This type of quantitative information is useful as it can be comfortably recognised as evidence by peers interested in adopting the method with their students, and by managers who have the ultimate power to influence curriculum offerings. This kind of hard evidence legitimises the research process. It provides a way to demonstrate how circles might contribute to improvements in ESOL learning for students, teachers, managers and funders, amongst others. It can help to identify the language learning sticking points and where TLA attention could be directed to support improvements.

It fits well with current ways of evidencing educational impact, with targets and measurements, in a technical sense. It makes it appear as if it is possible to find the same kind of certainty as that which can be obtained from laboratory experiments, and that it is possible to apply that kind of clarity in the classroom. This is the type of clarity that identifies a need in education and produces something, such as a national policy, a curriculum or a set of resources, to address it. This ideal of universal application is popular in our modern world as it has the claim to laws and certainty. However, these things cannot be useful or provide good education in all situations.

By itself, quantitative data and analysis isn't the most suitable approach for looking at human experience. It is difficult to apply the quantitative tradition to this research project alone as it makes it hard to acknowledge what a circle experience *feels* like and it is unable to give a full picture what is happening at the heart of the project. An integrated circle is a method that draws out and builds on human communication and interaction (Alexander, 2017; Burbules, 2007; Sennett, 2012; 2018) which simultaneously celebrates the use of imagination and life experience to help reach understandings of texts, tasks and language skills (Carter, 2000), as it enables students take control of cognitive development via questioning (Clarke, 2001) and collaboration (Fisher, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). This is undertaken in critical, creative and caring ways (Lipman, 2003) utilising allocated roles to scaffold open student-led discussions (Biesta, 2006; 2014) about reading (Daniels, 2002; Furr, 2009) and writing (Gunnery, 2007).

It's a complicated process where individual learning is interwoven with group learning, and largely depends on the sharing of personal connections students make to the texts and with their peers (Duncan, 2014). My initial reading circles project started to indicate this to me as I noticed how students were sharing understandings arising from their 'close encounters' with texts and each other, and the subsequent writing circles project suggested that this opened a way to 'see more clearly' when producing their own written work (Peters, 2013; 2017).

With the integrated circle method resting so centrally on human experience and relationships in a collaborative learning process, it is unlikely that the quantitative research tradition can play the primary role in attempting to explain its potential

impacts. Therefore, in order to better reflect this particular research issue, it is necessary to consider a research tradition other than positivism/empiricism.

Scott and Usher (1996) highlight how developments in social science research indicated that a 'scientific' approach may not be best suited to educational research. In particular, their summary of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970), sets out how the view of research as being objective and neutral contradicts with the activity of research which is undertaken within the socio-historical practices of specific research communities. This activity takes place within the agreed paradigm of the time, described as 'the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques shared by members of a given scientific community' (Kuhn, 1970, quoted in Scott and Usher, *ibid*, p.15).

This implies that research is a social activity, rather than a series of individual scientific endeavours; it is not a case of discovering set truths via a technical process, but of developing interpretations of situations and events. This view adds a qualitative, hermeneutic/interpretive dimension in contrast to the positivist/empiricist, quantitative research tradition.

Qualitative research tradition

Under the hermeneutic/interpretive model (*ibid*, pp.18-22), the ontological view is that reality is socially constructed and grounded in multi-dimensional, culturally-conditioned social practices. Epistemologically, claims to good knowledge are made by human action in the context of social practices and social interaction. Researcher and participants are both involved in the research process. It is linked to qualitative methods. The emerging findings are interpreted as the investigation proceeds, with interpretations coloured by individuals' subconscious cultural beliefs. In this paradigm it is difficult to be the objective, impartial, spectator-observer found in the quantitative tradition.

In contrast to the qualitative approach, the idea of a neutral spectator-observer opens the path to describe and evaluate what is seen in a way which is more than opinion. The quantitative methodology is based on removing opinion in favour of objective facts and evidence-based practice. This moves away from tradition, inherited wisdom and practical understandings as sources of knowledge and knowing. The historical (Duncan, 2014, p.19) use of circles is an insufficient

source of knowledge in its own right. However, an impartial research position makes the reporting of the circle experience in an honest and authentic way more difficult, as the circle method brings the human aspect to bear on the research project.

As I draw nearer to the idea that conversation in circles acts as a barometer of relationships and a conduit of experience, I find that I need to explore what happens, when learners (with their teacher) work together, in circles. The qualitative tradition will provide an opportunity to capture a range of experiences, which would not be possible using quantitative techniques alone.

This is a meaningful approach for the circle project as it recognises the specific research context, and that the participants come to it with existing experience of the world, both as language learners and as citizens. Each individual participant will have experienced the world differently, in their own way, so that their personal knowledge and understandings are unique, but always real. The gains from circles appear to be increased learning arising from previous experience: extending own and building on others. This emphasises the interpretative/constructionist view of the world.

This is intriguing for me because no circle participant (teacher or student) can attempt to know what others' experiences are until they are shared. The circle can provide the space to share experiences which are held internally and silently. When students recognise or have questions about an experience, this can result in the 'drive to speak' (Duncan, 2014) born out of the diversity of life experience and perspectives within a circle group. This is at variance with the quantitative tradition which implies that all participants would see the same thing, in the same way, in all settings.

The qualitative approach foregrounds the difference that difference can make. None of us can be in the minds of other people, but we can attempt to better understand others' thinking when we exchange views. We may sometimes believe we have complete understanding, but most likely we have only our own interpretation of what others' have said. Talking together can bring the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation closer together. Individual views need to be treated with respect and to be taken seriously if an open and honest exchange

is to take place. If these conditions are met in a circle it can scaffold a critical meeting of minds, which may merge experience and develop knowledge.

In this respect, the integrated circle method can enlarge individuals' own interpretations in light of learning from other perspectives. Gadamer (1975, cited in Scott and Usher, 1996, p.19) sees this enlargement as 'a fusion of horizons', in which knowledge and understanding become broader and consensus can be sought through critical discussion of logical arguments. Gunnery (2007) noticed this with regard to writing circles, in Chapter 2, when she commented that:

a personal view is expanded when an idea is expressed from another point of view, a deeper understanding of the writing process can be achieved when observing various examples and approaches (ibid., p.9)

This is an aspect which may appear in the emerging data to follow.

It also makes me aware of the challenge of capturing experience: the different experiences of students and teacher, but also the way a researcher is embedded in the same world as the students and teachers. This difficulty is compounded for me as the students' teacher and also the researcher. The line between roles can blur and it can be difficult to separate the experience as it is experienced in these dual roles.

The second issue it raises is what good research looks like. Lawrence Stenhouse, in his article '*The illuminative research tradition*' (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985), indicates that good research brings to life the world under investigation in such a way that those reading about it are moved to become aware of a situation or a condition, which they had previously taken for granted and accepted unquestioningly. It is harder to disregard or overlook matters if they are brought vividly to life.

Stenhouse (ibid.) uses the example of the novel '*Madame Bovary*' to illustrate his argument. By looking at a particular situation carefully and expressing the nature of it, it is possible to achieve a kind of generalisability. Although the novel is focused on a specific situation, at a specific time and in a specific place, it is focused on human relationships which have universal relevance. Other situations,

other times and places will not be exactly the same as in '*Madame Bovary*', but elements of that life can be relevant and useful to others.

It is generalizable because the issues and human problems of that setting exist in other situations, times and places. There are parallels which readers can recognise in or for themselves, expressed as an 'appeal to judgment which is the appraisal of credibility in light of the reader's experience' (ibid., p.31).

Quantitative forms of generalisation are based on universally applicable 'laws' which lends authority to data and findings. A qualitative situation involves wrestling with the idea of experience and how to take that as seriously as hard data and to give it authority. Authority may be found in the idea of warrant (Flyvberg, 2004) which provides merit for a particular situation as it reflects similar experiences in similar situations.

Warrant, in part, is how a situation strikes home and is recognisable in powerful ways. A classroom experience can be recognised by other teachers: they may recognise their own learners and similar issues in their own classrooms. Warrant can be found where the accounts of ESOL students, in this circle classroom, resonate with others.

Qualitative generalisations are based in specific situations, but what gives them wider application are the commonalities between people. They capture human experience so other humans can see something relevant to their own experience. This can help people make sense of those things that they take for granted. It raises the issues around how we identify inherent assumptions and how people negotiate what these mean.

A criticism of the interpretative approach focuses on the validity and reliability of the qualitative data, unlike its quantitative cousin. Therefore, it is important to draw information from a range of sources and compare what they can tell us about the effects of the circle investigation. This is about taking steps to triangulate data and is discussed with narrative accounts and research design below.

Critical theory

Critics of positivism and the interpretive tradition lean towards critical theory. This questions the traditional alignments of the quantitative model which is seen to serve particular vested interests and limit human experience. There is less tension with the qualitative tradition which focuses on human experience (Scott and Usher, 1996, pp.22-25).

Scott and Usher (ibid.) cite Habermas (1972), as a key proponent of critical theory. Under this view, society provides us with a false consciousness of ways of living as our sense of reality is inherited. It is shaped by entrenched social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values, which establish the system of power relationships that control what is accepted to be knowledge, and who has access to it.

Critical theory attempts to expose ways of living imposed by the power of the taken for granted, unquestioned social relationships. It includes an emancipatory purpose for research. Research should aim to break free from the pre-conceived ideas which govern society, allowing people to question accepted norms and to take action to improve lives.

When Stenhouse (Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985) contrasts traditional research questionnaire responses with the novel '*Madame Bovary*', it is to highlight how the quantitative, scientific experiment approach cannot reveal lived experience, such as the daily issues facing real people living in the real world, because the spectator-observer view is an abstract, distant portrait of reality. It can deal with *what*, for example, quantitative data can show us which assessment criteria have improved, or not, with circle participation. It struggles with the issues behind the figures, for example to explain these outcomes in terms of *who, how and why*. An approach that is 'in the world' will be more helpful for the circle's investigation because that is about people, who are dealing with other people, and who are having real life experiences.

An illustration of this was provided by army Captain Louis Rudd, speaking to BBC News on 12 January 2019, about his achievement to be the first solo British person to cross Antarctica unaided. He described how important it was to erect the tent in a "careful and methodical way" in windy conditions. He followed a set of tried and tested instructions designed to ensure survival.

He also described his worries as he walked and could feel the wind speed increasing around him. This made him ask himself when would be the best time to stop for the day, how difficult it was going to be to make sure the tent did not blow inside out, or blow away across the snowy expanse. He was talking about his experience of survival.

He included details of the inspiration for his trek, the effects on family life, not having a shower for 75 days, of losing 15 kilos and fantasizing about eating steak. This is not the kind of information you can discover from the instructions of how to put up a tent.

Critical theory adds a larger interpretation of experience by indicating through details. It also aims to challenge our assumptions which impose limits on others and asks us to do something about them: to take action to emancipate ourselves from our socially conditioned views of the world – contrary to popular belief, it *is* possible to cross the Antarctic successfully alone and unaided, albeit with the proper experience and skills.

Scott and Usher (1996) indicate how critical theory rejects the idea that knowledge can be objective on the basis that we all live in a world made by, and with, other people from which we construct our realities. This is sympathetic to the ideals in the circle which welcomes all honest perspectives equally on the grounds that they can be justified, or amended, under critical questioning. This has echoes of the idea of 'validity claims' put forward by Habermas (1972), which is explained by Scott and Usher (*ibid.*, p.23) as:

any communicative transaction when one person says something to another person that implicitly makes the following claims:

- that what is being said is intelligible or meaningful;
- that the propositional content of what is said is true;
- that the speaker is justified in saying what he or she is saying;
- that the speaker is speaking sincerely.

The need to be meaningful, true, justified and sincere is also crucial to the information set out in this thesis, along with Habermas' perception of truth as something which can be supported by arguments to 'warrant' claims, from which agreement or consensus can be reached. Scott and Usher describe this as 'rational agreement reached through critical discussions' (ibid., p.23) and it is also what circles can encourage learners to engage with.

The main concern of critical theory in research practices is praxis (ibid., pp.24-25). This calls for researchers to take the necessary action to establish the conditions needed to allow for open and equal dialogue with participants and other researchers. This charges research with a responsibility to foster democracy, and not just to find out quantitative or qualitative information about the world.

Criticisms of this theory are levelled at its idea that emancipation can be universally achieved, despite this not always being possible. As this project is taking place within the bounds of national and institutional policies, is small-scale and localised there will be limits to the ambitious aims critical theory wishes to attain.

However, there is an element of critical theory ambition in this project. This can be seen where the circle recognises the valuable contribution ESOL learners can make to the classroom and wider society, in contrast to persistent political representations as being drains on the economy and detrimental to social cohesion.

In Chapter 2, Hamilton and Hillier (2009) revealed how ESOL learners often go unheard in society at large. A circle approach may be a good way of ESOL teaching and learning as it celebrates and acknowledges student voice through the sharing of experience in the circle discussions.

There is also an opportunity to highlight the method for other teachers who are perhaps concerned about teaching ESOL, searching for alternative ideas to help teach English in their classrooms or wondering about other models of 'good' quality education compared to the technical approach. The circle offers an opportunity to break free from the straitjacket of SfL. Some may view good ESOL

as a curriculum broken down into competences but a circle pedagogy offers more than the instruction of a set of specified language skills.

These skills are certainly essential in the modern world. They are instruments required by employers, for further education, and for practical use in everyday living, so these skills must feature in teaching and learning, but there is also the possibility to widen what takes place in the classroom to include reflective dialogue. As students practise language, make connections and reflect on their learning and shared understandings, they can be working out what it is to be a critical citizen in their learning community (Lipman, 2003).

This research design also identifies a role for the teacher as an active participant in the research process: to be seen as competent to undertake research as well as having the professional ability to respond to learners' language needs. In this manner, teachers are responsible and accountable for the way in which they observe, reflect and take action both for regular classrooms and for research projects.

The research traditions of quantitative, qualitative and critical theory hold messages for this research project. They have helped to clarify the tensions between attending to policy wants while responding to student needs, and the importance of reflexivity in circle methodology and methods.

Methodology and methods for circles

This research project is concerned with the human dimension, alongside factual outcomes, of circles for adult ESOL teaching and learning. The enquiry seeks to understand the impact of the circles method in an ESOL context by interpreting what participation in the circle means as a social experience and also what it means for English language development. This dual focus draws on both quantitative and qualitative methods, for example pre- and post-intervention assessment results and descriptions of observed cases. This is to capture a holistic picture of this research at this moment in time and appreciates that the work by an individual (the teacher-researcher) with individuals (the students) will include natural variance. The ontology is of the 'humanness' of social meanings. The epistemology lies in qualitative human understandings as knowledge rather than quantitative 'facts' of statistics and numbers'.

The methodology reflects dialogic circle relationships, but recognises the role of 'hard' evidence in this specific FE context. The aim is to take a practical approach on the understanding that this is part of an on-going and evolving enquiry.

The process requires all participants to reflect and be prepared to amend their own presuppositions about the ESOL learning process. Perhaps it may also be possible to consider how to effect change in the ESOL classroom to give learners a better voice, and to provide an alternative view for teaching and learning policy makers. In the search for these improvements, this small-scale research project may serve to illuminate aspects of richer ESOL teaching and learning for others to reflect and draw upon.

Reflecting and being reflexive are 'legitimized as appropriate ways of knowing and exploring the world' (O'Leary, 2004, p.6). Being reflexive opens up ways to explore and describe the accuracy demands and the creativity of fluency in the ESOL classroom, using methods gleaned from my professional experience as being appropriate for this context. I do this by critically researching myself, the students and what we do in circles to look for positive and negative impacts on our experiences. This means that there are times when quantitative methods are useful for measuring the accuracy of skills assessments and times when qualitative methods are more appropriate for capturing the quality of circles.

However, at the same time as being the researcher, I am also deeply involved as the teacher and a participant of circles with my own views. I witness the limiting effects of ESOL policy every day so I am drawn in particular directions as I seek to do my very best as an ESOL professional.

Further, I have a specific personal background that sets me apart from every other person in the ESOL classroom. I am white and western with English as my first language. I have a higher level of education, I earn more money and I have a stronger network of support than most of the learners. These elements put me in a position of power. My classroom role as traditional 'leader' but also trusted listener, my ease of understanding the circles process and research matters such as informed consent were ethical considerations, in addition to the impact my own views could have on the project.

It was important that I sought to understand circles from the participants' points of view and not to impose my own interpretations on individual backgrounds and experiences. Reflecting on how all participants could contribute to maximise different ESOL views and layering them with the quantitative information in this specific context was a way to look for the key impacts of circles above the messages from literature about other times, places and people and to neutralise my own opinions.

A research design based on one existing paradigm would not have suited the circles process. The concept of circles required a pragmatic mix of research methods to capture the reality of circles experienced at this time, in this way, at this place, with these people.

With this study being at my workplace about a workplace issue and being a new step in my reflexive circles research process, an action research strategy was chosen. Firstly, being inside the iteration of research I could methodically bring my ESOL teaching experience, knowledge and reflexivity to the development of this study. Secondly, the participatory nature of action research enabled students to be reflexive critical participants.

Taking a reflexive position means that the ESOL situation is not set in stone. There is opportunity for change and growth through considering what others have done, what I have done/am doing and what I could do differently. This gave an approach to the raw data that 'funnelled towards understanding by uncovering/discovering themes that are reflexively interpreted' (ibid., p.195) from a mix of ideas from literature, quantitative measures and the experiences of those directly involved.

This chapter continues with a discussion of action research (McNiff, 2014) as a strategy relevant for the investigation of circle experience. I will set out my main data collection methods and include how narrative accounts (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) assist in connecting the localised project more broadly. Research dilemmas and anticipated outcomes are also reviewed.

Part 2: The research strategy: action research

The research strategy

The focus on a specific classroom issue in one FE institution draws the project to an action research approach, as in the words of Blaxter, Tight and Hughes (2010, p.69):

It is well suited to the needs of people conducting research in their workplaces, and who have a focus on improving aspects of their own and their colleagues' practices... because it offers a systematic approach to the definition, solution and evaluation of problems and concerns.

The process of reflection for improvement started with the 2011/12 reading circle pilot and was followed by the LSIS Exploratory Action Research project 2012/13 in ESOL, (Chapter 1, part 3). The title of the LSIS programme guided the research approach taken for the project, which offered an opportunity to examine one working ESOL classroom and consider potential solutions.

As the initial reading circle project developed to include writing circles, it indicated that an action-reflection cycle was in progress (ibid., 2010, p.71; McNiff and Whitehead, 2011, p.9). This current project has grown directly out of the preceding circle projects, denoting that the activity is part of an iterative process. It is seeking to understand a workplace difficulty for ESOL pedagogy, to consider an alternative approach, to assess the outcomes and implement amendments, before repeating a reflective/evaluative cycle with the aim of ever-improving ESOL learning.

McNiff and Whitehead (2006, pp.1-2), note how practitioners are sometimes viewed as not being competent enough to participate in the debate around theories of improving learning and therefore are largely excluded from the associated policy debate. However, they go on to highlight how individuals reflecting on their own practice can create 'living theories' to be used to improve practice.

In my own research situation, issues with inconsistent exam results at my institution created cause to reflect on existing practice and how improvements

could be made - not only for statistical purposes, but for the student experience. This project, set in my own classroom, enables me as a teacher to pay close attention to my own way of working, to look for ways to better support ESOL students and for ways of self-improvement and how to share this with colleagues. This thesis is a personal contribution to the professional debate of what constitutes effective ESOL pedagogy and my personal evolving theory is based on democratic learning circles which I continually seek to better understand through action research.

The method – Action Research

Action research is a wide and varied field of enquiry. There are various competing views about what action research is and who, how and why it should be done. McNiff (2014) explains the background and development of action research as simultaneously a traditional, informal practice and an academic exercise. The former relates to ordinary people who, in going about their day-to-day lives, identify an issue, evaluate the existing situation and develop actions to improve the difficulty. Examples of this include the type of decisions people make to successfully complete their individual daily routines, or to develop social systems and technical tools. The latter is about action research as a form of study, usually conducted at university level by researchers, to develop and explain theoretical ideas based on accounts from practitioners' workplaces.

The modern-day development of action research as a strategy is attributed to the social scientist, Kurt Lewin, working in the USA in the 1940s. This is where this type of research process became formally known as action research. The strategy was taken up in the UK in the 1970s, most prominently by Lawrence Stenhouse and his work on school curriculum. Stenhouse also advocated the notion of teachers as researchers.

Early application of the strategy in teacher education began to formulate some basic tenets for action research, such as the need for democratic and disciplined enquiry practices. It came to be useful in a range of professions including management, social development and healthcare.

However, action research is not a fixed, unified strategy. Rather it is an umbrella term for various approaches which draw on their own sets of underlying values.

When McNiff (ibid.) summarises the main interpretations, some focus on the technical aspects of methods and procedures whilst others are concerned with ideals. These ideals can link action research to the different research methodologies discussed above such as social constructivism or critical theory.

However, common to the differing perspectives are certain key underlying principles in action research based on collaboration, care and respect of others, being self-reflective, and aiming for social change. It is situated and contextualised and is an on-going, developmental process in which the researcher must take care to critically assess before making any claims about their own work. The values-base put forward by McNiff (ibid.) for this kind of action research holds meaning for this localised project and the nature of the circle method.

In addition, the cyclical and on-going nature of this study lends itself to action research and the action-reflection process. This research strategy enables a systematic investigation in which the problem and context are explored and research questions are established and examined. Data is gathered and analysed, with emerging findings scrutinised by participants and professional peers in order to modify or validate the developing conclusions. This feeds in to the next stage of action as practice is modified in light of findings and opens up future steps for the individual researcher-practitioner. The strategy also holds an element of educative influence as it could be used to highlight possible new ways of teaching and learning for other classroom professionals, curriculum managers, policy and strategy makers or other interested parties.

An important aspect of action research is the space it provides for self-reflection for my professional development and personal capacity building. This growth is not restricted to developing knowledge and skills directly related to classroom TLA practices, but also includes developing a set of research skills, to become more aware of subject relevant literature and key thinkers, to find a new position as a member of a community of research-practitioners. This is rich ground to draw and reflect on new ideas and consider how these can be incorporated with or amend existing practices.

In this respect action research reflects aspects of integrated circles. Circle participants bring their own understandings of language learning and life

experience to their classrooms, to discuss together, to share and learn from each other. My personal action-reflection learning journey is running in parallel with my students' ESOL circle learning journey.

Action Research and Circles

An action research methodology was selected for this project based on the underlying principles set out by McNiff (2014, p.23). Firstly, action research is a collaborative and democratic process, which can enable marginalised voices to be heard. This seems to serve the interests of ESOL well in light of issues raised in Chapter 1 and the discussion of the status of ESOL at a national level and in the local context.

This connects to further action research principles that it takes place in a specific setting, situating and giving context to the issue being investigated. The issue in question is investigated methodically in order to work towards an improvement for the benefit of others, but is not seen as final. It is an evolving process which works to transform the learning of all involved: the researcher, the participants and the wider community such as peer teachers and managers. Setting out the research process and emerging findings for others opens the project to critical scrutiny, which is integral to being accountable. Critical appraisal by others and critical self-reflection provides an avenue to return to the project with amended action. In the words of Pring (2015, p.45), 'There is no end to this systematic reflection with a view to improving practice'.

Following the action research method it has been possible to:

- Identify a workplace problem in the ESOL classroom
- Actively participate and reflect on the problem in a small-scale way
- Draw on 'insider knowledge' of the workplace
- Aim to improve practice by investigating an alternative TLA for ESOL classes
- Use the method for personal growth and self-development
- Share the project with direct participants and a public audience to be open to scrutiny
- Reflect on personal pedagogical values to seek potential better learning experiences whilst recognising policy values based on employability and integration agendas

- See how my action research process mirrors student learning experiences in the circle method which encourages participants to identify own learning issues, learn from and with others and seek feedback from others with the aim of transforming their own abilities and understandings.

Action research also provides flexibility in terms of gathering evidence. This is useful for collecting information for circles as it allows for the mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative data (Denscombe, 2017, p.131). Mixed methods acknowledge both the accuracy work and fluency experience that takes place in circles.

Assessment results can provide hard evidence of impacts on language skills development but only give a simple technical view of which changes occur. It also restricts participants to narrow channels of feedback through numerical ratings. Qualitative data provides greater freedom for participants to feedback in more open ways. This can produce a more rounded picture of circle experience but may be too personal to have relevance for others. A combined approach draws on the benefits and mitigates the limitations of each.

Experience of circles was captured from assessment results to provide quantitative data. Focus groups, questionnaires, circle observations, examples of work, participants' diaries and project field notes enabled qualitative data collection. These documents formed the basis of my data collection and the process is charted in Chapter 4.

Interpreting this range of information meant slowly making my way to my understanding of circles through a continuous process of reflecting on them in action and relating them to the literature. I was engaged in 'reflective learning' (Ghaye, 2011, p.35) to help me make sense of circles from the past, to better understand them in the present and how they might work in the future.

My research enabled me look at circles and to 'see these encounters in new ways' requiring me to 'reflect on information' I collected and 'to openly dialogue with the information' (ibid. p.35) in order to 'look inside and see what's there' (ibid., p.36). This began to reveal key themes related to pedagogy, conversation and autonomy

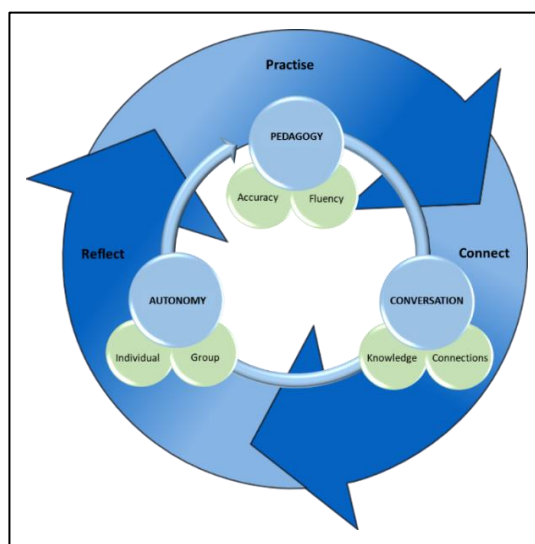
linked to overarching principles in integrated circles to practise, connect and reflect.

The main themes are sub-divided into areas which link to the possible outcomes of circles for learners. Therefore, **pedagogy** takes in the aspect of circles that require language *accuracy* and language *fluency*. It uses roles and teacher input to scaffold accurate language learning. Student-led discussions foster fluency in self-expression, authentic communication and relationship building.

Conversation incorporates the ways in which circle discussions share *knowledge* which can be in critical, creative, caring and collaborative ways and built on the personal *connections* learners make to self, others, texts and tasks. These two aspects provide opportunities to provide each other with feedback for language learning and learning about different life experiences.

Autonomy draws on the space circles provide for *individuals* to express their own language knowledge and life stories and for the *group* to learn from the sharing of these experiences - time for learners to reflect on and expand their own ideas and skills in concert with peers, and utilise new and growing knowledge in language tasks with more confidence. It can also lead to students influencing lesson directions.

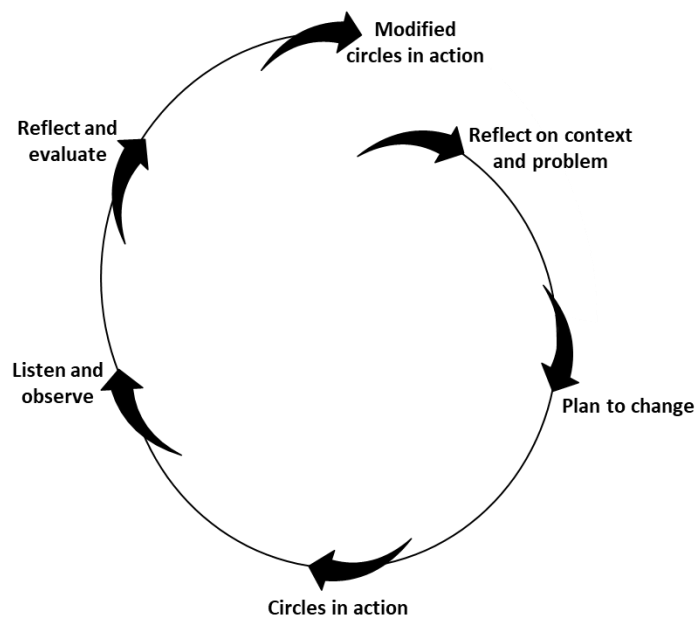
These themes feed into each other in an ongoing process, and are represented in the diagram below:



3.1 Key circle themes and principles

Reflexivity

O’Leary (2004) helped me earlier in this thesis to recognise the reflexive nature of this study and there were three linked ways in which I undertook my action-reflection. Firstly, with other people: the direct circle participants, ESOL staff, fellow research students, research supervisors and external critics who looked on. Secondly, I reflected with myself on my own experience, my own notes and my evolving understandings. Thirdly, there were other views about circles from relevant literature to reflect on. My own listening, thinking, conversations, reading and writing comprised my ‘transaction with the situation’ (Schön, 1991, p.164) where a reflective stance was taken in order to try to make sense of integrated circles and to search for improvements. This was my own action-reflection cycle adapted from McNiff and Whitehead, (2011, p.9):



3.2 Action-Reflection-cycle

My movement through this cycle began by reflecting on historical and modern ESOL policy, the local context and past circles research to clarify the contemporary situation. Academic literature about theories of pedagogy and practical literature about circles helped me to plan the integrated method that might suit the setting.

In 17/18, I implemented the first circle plan. I observed circles in action and I listened to the participants for feedback on the process. I kept a reflective

notebook to record new ideas and to think things through. My notes were often messy - put on the paper quickly to capture an idea in the moment. It took time to organise my reflections on information from literature, from the classroom and from those holding me to account.

I kept a record of what happened in the classroom as my field notes. I reported my teacher's notes back to the participants to check for accuracy and supplemented these with my researcher's reflections.

Taking my reflections to the classroom was an essential part of my reflective process. It was imperative to me that I reflected back my interpretations of the participants' experience so as not to distort it. In addition, with the support of my head of curriculum I was given time in monthly team meetings to report on the progress of my research, to answer questions and to reflect on the developing model.

Sharing my thoughts with others helped me to sift through my thinking. Being on the ETF/SUNCETT programme meant being a member of a critical research community with critical friends. I also benefited from critical dialogues with wider professional contacts who offered an outsider's eye and helped me to better explain my work to those unfamiliar with ESOL.

The dialogue I maintained between myself, literature, circle participants, critical friends and work colleagues was a way to reflect on my circle research process. I was comparing concepts of circles with classroom experience to construct a 'living' theory (McNiff and Whitehead, 2006, p.15) 'made up of reflective conversations and actual teaching episodes, created through retrospective thinking about practice and the public validation of accounts of it' (Ghaye, 2011, p.41) to inform the practice of integrated circles.

Listening to others and being called to account for myself meant being prepared for the moments that 'shone out' (Flyvberg, 2004) to me to be 'disturbed' (Ghaye, 2011, p.139) by new or different views of circles. My reflective notes were revised as my understanding developed through listening to the voices in the project in conjunction with my live experience.

I was developing integrated circles as an insider – the teacher in the classroom at the specific setting. A benefit of being inside the research process was the way in which it undercut the local and wider hierarchy: I initiated and led the project giving me professional agency, rather than being the subject of a project imposed from above or externally. However, as the project manager I was then potentially imposing this research on my classroom giving rise to the consideration of ethics of power.

I discuss issues relating to insider research and the steps I took to offset particular research considerations through Mercer (2007) in my thesis. My actions were the result of my reflecting on my ESOL experience and the understanding that gave me of likely issues - where past experience talked to the present and guided my actions (Ghaye, 2011, pp.61-62).

The power imbalance inherent in this project was my dual position as teacher and researcher in the teacher-student and the researcher-researched relationship. This urged me to take care: to be caring towards my students as ESOL learners and as participants sharing their classwork, their experiences and reflections with me (Lipman, 2003); to handle their data carefully and to be careful that what I shared with others was done so with consent (Ghaye, 2011, p.144).

The combination of interactions with people, myself and texts was my means of being 'in conversation' (Schön, 1991, p.151) with the research process 'in order to make new sense of [my] transactions with the situation' (ibid., p.164). I was engaged in a constant back and forth between initial ideas, new insights and developing understandings.

Recording my thinking and re-thinking in my reflective notebook and colour coding emerging ideas enabled me to see more clearly the 'certain relatively constant elements' (ibid., p.164) in integrated circles for key circle themes and theories (diagrams 3.1 and 4.36). The on-going reflective conversation gave me a sensitivity to the tightening of management control on the classroom during 'fresh start', to seek student-led spaces, to act on participant feedback on circles in conjunction with listening to the other sources of data which influenced amendments to the circle plan for 18/19 and eventually to identify five main

impacts. The way in which I worked with the collected data is detailed in Chapter 4.

This particular project is specific to a time and place at the institution and groups of students in question meaning it can be problematic to identify wider or broader application. However, as Pring notes localised research 'can illuminate or be suggestive of practice elsewhere' (2015, p.43). Therefore, in order to attempt to illustrate the impact of circles the project also includes examples of narrative accounts in order to tell participants' own stories (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990) to capture the qualitative dimensions of experience.

Narrative account as a research method

Connelly and Clandinin (ibid., p.2) establish a clear link to the circle project when they state that 'the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world'. This is a useful way of approaching circles, particularly as they go on to note how 'education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories' (ibid., p.2). This element of learning and amending personal information about language and the world around us from discussions in which others are sharing their own 'stories' seems key. The process of utilising the narrative account will enable me to 'tell the story' of the participants' experience of the circle intervention but it is not without limitations.

Connelly and Clandinin (ibid.) set out a series of criticisms levelled at narrative methods. They note how individual anecdotes often override the social context; that the researcher may distort the data they collect by their personal interpretations of it; and that these interpretations may produce imagined causal links, or perhaps false results especially where the data is used to 'paint a perfect picture' rather than a 'warts and all' description.

In order address these concerns, the narrative account for the integrated circle includes, a 'narrative sketch' (ibid., p.11). This is a response to the first criticism as the narrative sketch is designed to provide a broad outline of a research context. Chapter 1 included the description of the local setting and this chapter includes my planned actions, the main characters and events that feature in the telling of this research journey. This is about contextualising the narrative.

To maintain the integrity of qualitative data it was collected from various sources to make comparisons possible and what these could tell us about the effects of the circle investigation. Such data was drawn from field notes of observed circle work, student dairy entries, circle discussion transcripts which include examples of student storytelling and student written feedback. This was to triangulate the qualitative data to look for meaningful results which, when layered with quantitative results, could produce holistic meanings. As Connelly and Clandinin (*ibid.*, p.5) say, 'The sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings.'

Conversation is the focus for the project and is a source of rich 'tellings'. However, conversation between specific individuals, in a specific place, at a specific time about specific topics following unique non-linear conversational paths cannot be identically replicated between other individuals in other places and times as quantitative methods require. Conversation is susceptible to difference (Burbules, 2007). Yet, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) show it is a helpful way to present lived circle experience as it comes from voices within the circle.

Making circle voices audible influenced the methods used and the presentation of findings. I made use of unstructured observations of circle conversations which allowed me to record a rich description of what participants were saying and doing in their discussions. I wrote my notes up on the same day whilst the events were still fresh in my mind. The limitation was it was impossible to record every nuance of every interaction that took place within each circle conversation. The collection of qualitative paper-based data was a means to compare what I had observed with participants' direct work and reflections to help 'fill the gaps' of the observation process.

My observations and student feedback helped to identify significant aspects of the circle process from within the circle compared to messages from the literature review. Follow-up semi-structured interviews assisted in building personal anecdotes of circles towards a deeper description of common elements allowing for a more generalizable picture. Therefore, Chapter 4 includes extracts from circle discussions, a small case study, participant self-reflections and feedback that illuminate experience of circles through participants' unique words that go towards

expressing the general impacts of the circle process and which may be recognisable for others.

Combining a range of sources aimed at being truly reflective of participant experience. In honouring this intention, learners had to have space to express their own voice. Therefore, it was essential that my interpretations of data were reported back to them as the project developed and was written up. Examples of this 'checking in' were times when I clarified something a participant had said on a one-to-one basis, or with the wider circle group for points arising out of their conversation or with the whole class such as general feedback on mock results, to agree the final written examples of personal experiences.

The benefit was that in questioning the narrative I had, I was verifying if it was a good account of the experience. The students, as participants in the research process, could agree or disagree. This meant that the account was updated and amended so that it represented our joint reality. The narrative approach offered a useful method to capture both my teacher's perspective of the circle method and the students' experience of it.

This aspect of narrative research is not only important in terms of the checks and balances required to corroborate what is reported, but is also a key link to the issue of voice in ESOL. Crucially, it is about feeling secure enough to trust your peers to take you seriously and to build supportive relationships which learners are not afraid to participate in. This gives the confidence to express self in the company of others as the integrated circle is a space for discussion, for language use and social relationships. This notion is captured by Britzman (quoted in Connelly and Clandinin, *ibid.*, p.4):

Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community... The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by others are all a part of this process... Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his experience and hence, to language, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process.

Further, when students feel confident with class relationships, they can be more at ease in the classroom. The anxiety of performance in front of others is reduced. They can enjoy participating and engage with language in such a way that a 'spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room' (Furr, 2009, p.6). A quantitative graph, table or chart cannot represent the atmosphere that fills an effective circle in the way a story can.

The principles on which to base a narrative account are tied up with explanations, interpretation and collaboration in which 'truths' are said to be found in authenticity and experience. This turns the method in a qualitative, human direction given research robustness through apparency and verisimilitude, transferability, authenticity, familiarity and plausibility (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, pp.7-8).

A narrative account makes use of empirical data, but is an illustrative record of a research study. It is a source of information which may chime with other practitioners and offer useful insights for their settings; in the words of Peshkin (1985, quoted in Connelly and Clandinin, *ibid.*, p.8), 'to look where I did and see what I saw'. The authenticity of narrative accounts is strengthened when others can recognise events as 'true' from their own experiences in classrooms. There is the possibility that from this account, others may be able to relate to what it means to be an ESOL teacher and an ESOL student in the circle's environment.

What is also relevant about the narrative model is the potential role Connelly and Clandinin (*ibid.*, p.12) see for it in the improvement of practice. This provides a connection to the aims of the action research approach. Therefore, the use of a narrative account to describe an action research process is complimentary in a qualitative approach and together they can bring the quantitative experience to life.

The research design

This section will provided a brief narrative sketch of the research context with descriptions of the local setting, planned actions, the main characters and events that feature in the research process. The detailed account follows in Chapter 4.

The integrated circle project commenced in December 2017. Participants were drawn from the 17/18 adult ESOL students in my E3 classes. It was held at the

same FE college in the north of England where my previous reading and writing circle action research had taken place.

A second iteration took place in 18/19 taking the action research process into account, whereby the integrated circle approach was modified in light of 17/18 findings. Again, the participants were drawn from my E3 adult ESOL classes.

These students were invited to participate for four reasons:

1. The students were aged over 19 years so could be counted as adult learners
2. The students were learning English as a second or other language
3. The students were enrolled in an E3 ESOL class
4. The students could participate during their usual college time, meaning it did not exclude any members who wished to participate from doing so by adding additional burdens to their routine schedules. This was especially important for students who fit college around work hours and/or family commitments.

A fifth reason related to the institution, where my timetable and room availability, meant the project could not take place at any other time. This entailed that the sampling technique used to collect data was based on convenience rather than random selection so the resulting findings cannot be treated as being representative of the larger ESOL population. The value lies in the insights participants offer of their circle experience and marries with the idea of illuminative, narrative accounts.

The research plan for 17/18 is presented below which shows the steps I took to adapt circles for multicultural and multilingual adult students to manage space for student conversations within the compulsory curriculum.

Steps	Rationale
1. Establish my timetabled E3 classroom as the 'field' site.	It was equipped with the tools experience had taught me were needed for ESOL SfL and circle classes: an interactive whiteboard, a whiteboard with coloured pens and eraser, space to comfortably move desks and chairs into discussion groups.
2. Establish my staff area as the 'data records' site with a lockable filing	To follow research protocol to store paper documents such as signed

cabinet, lockable office door and secure computer system.	consent forms, field notes and examples of student work and to store electronic data such as assessment results securely.
3. Amend and print the university participant information sheet and consent form.	To use my ESOL knowledge to make language more readily comprehensible for E3 learners so that decisions to participate, or not, were informed choices.
4. Identify common reading and writing circles roles.	To blend circle roles on the professional understanding of holistic language; To investigate findings from previous thinkers and my emerging circles research findings for better ESOL outcomes.
5. Map circle roles to AECC.	To respond to policy demands and to demonstrate appropriateness of circles for institutional needs of accuracy.
6. Identify AECC references that do not link to roles.	To recognise spaces for fluency for meaningful interaction that offer students some sense of ownership; To indicate accuracy aspects that would need teacher input.
7. Map circle plan to SfL scheme of work.	To link the project to institutional systems; To implement circles in the classroom methodically.
8. Create circle role note-sheets with instructions and icons.	To provide the instructions for a new way of teaching and learning; To explain the process in an accessible way for language learners; To scaffold independent circle work.
9. Choose reading texts.	To fulfil SfL scheme of work topic accuracy; Using my understandings to carefully choose texts at appropriate language level and with content to better stimulate discussion fluency by offering different ways of looking at the content and to bring own experience to it.
10. Plan mini-lesson follow up tasks.	To deliver required SfL language points. Using my previous experience to understand probable language difficulties and suitable tasks to introduce, develop and consolidate learning.
11. Plan writing tasks to emulate the 6 possible assessed text types: Form, informal letter, formal letter, description, article or report.	To prepare students for accuracy-focused assessed tasks.
12. Plan self-reflective diaries.	To offer students a way to record voice and thinking on own progress and areas for development in skills accuracy and/or fluency; To promote

	autonomous action planning and taking; To inform future lesson plans.
13. Collect support resources: dictionaries, pens, paper, hole-punch and stapler.	To enable learners to participate if they forgot or did not have such learning tools.
14. Pre-circle: Preparation 1: Learner Voice focus group and follow-up questionnaire.	To discover the general picture of learners' experience of ESOL (what assists or hinders learning) and specific learning needs to inform lesson planning.
15. Research information 1.	To inform students about the research activity, to invite participation and informed consent.
16. Initial assessments: Plan and print learner self-assessments of reading, writing, speaking and listening with copies of assessment criteria.	To make assessment criteria explicit; To identify individual starting points for assessed skills accuracy from learners' experience as teacher; For learners to do this uninfluenced by mock results; To identify general initial results as researcher.
17. Print and deliver sample awarding body assessments for reading, writing, speaking and listening.	To adhere to the college's programme of mock exams; To identify individual ability in assessed skills for college records; To identify individual starting points against assessed skills as teacher and for research project.
18. Input results on college systems and research Excel database.	To record accuracy results per individual for institutional needs; To calculate the average initial assessment result for the research project's quantitative data.
19. Preparation 2: Introduction to roles and diaries.	Whole class exposition to introduce the concept of circles with question and answer / discussion to clarify the process for group and individuals; To promote learner autonomy through self-evaluation of progress, areas for development and next steps continuing to inform teacher lesson planning.
20. Research information 2.	To clarify the research activity for potential participants for their informed consent
21. Preparation 3: Research consent.	To clarify any remaining queries with participants and obtain informed consent.
22. x3 circle practise sessions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word Master/Feature Marker • Summariser/Discussion Leader • Passage Person/Connector. 	Whole class exposition using one role in each session that learners are familiar with from SfL tasks and one new one to avoid cognitive overload; Collective group work to start the transfer of circles discussion and dialogue to students.

23. The 6 text types (listed in step 11).	To recycle knowledge from Term 1 of potential accuracy-assessed tasks; To scaffold learners identifying text-specific language features needed for accuracy work; To provide supported fluency space to practise circle conversations with teacher help available.
<p>24. In-circle x6 sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading stimulus and allocated role. • Organise students into circle group(s) depending on numbers present on the day. • Students' circle discussion; Teacher monitors. • Plenary session for roles' feedback. • Type up key points and issue. • Take photocopies of learners' complete role sheets. • Teacher-led mini-lesson. • Group planning of writing task – based on reading text topic/exemplar, mini-lesson input and one of the 6 possible assessed text types. • Students complete diary page. • Writing task completed individually as homework. • New reading text and role allocated for next session. • Writing marked with feedback against awarding body's assessment criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To deliver SfL scheme of work topics referenced to the AECC; To provide a chance for all learners to try each of the 6 roles, starting with role they express being most comfortable with and rotating on. • To create weekly space for collaborative student-led conversations about topics drawing on lived experience as frame of reference; Understanding adults are capable of managing their own conversations; Recognising my teacher's role to step in only if conversations or relationships start to break down. • To create a record of discussion unique to that session. • To collect example of qualitative data. • To focus on an accuracy point exemplified in reading text and required for graded writing task. • To draw on peer feedback and teacher input for accuracy and fluency matters. • For self-reflection and action planning. • To give a new text and task to retain interest. • To give guidance and targets to improve writing accuracy. • To balance accuracy and fluency.
25. Observing circles: Choose a circle to observe each week based on the number of participants and take notes.	To observe a complete circle of 6 members representing the 6 roles as numbers present allow; To record observed actions, to type up that evening and note immediate reflections to form field notes for later data analysis.
26. Report back.	To check my interpretations with the participants for truthfulness; To return to field notes with later reflections.

27. Post-circle: End of project evaluation session.	To record learners' voices about circle experience; To draw student conclusions together for this research project; To inform next iteration.
28. Formative assessments Re-issue learner self-assessments of reading, writing, speaking and listening.	For students to reflect on individual progress against assessed skills accuracy; For learners to do this uninfluenced by mock results; To identify individual formative points for assessed skills accuracy as teacher; To identify general end results as researcher.
29. Print and deliver sample awarding body assessments for reading, writing, speaking and listening.	To adhere to the college's programme of mock exams; To identify individual ability in assessed skills for college records; To identify individual progress against assessed skills as teacher and for research project.
30. Input results on college systems and research Excel database.	To record accuracy results per individual for institutional needs; To calculate the average formative assessment result and track changes for the research project's quantitative data.
31. Prepare for 18/19 iteration: Adjust circle plan taking learner feedback into account.	To be responsive to learner needs; Continuing to develop my skills, knowledge and experience as an ESOL teacher.
32. Adjust steps taken following own reflections to add semi-structured interviews and a video-recorded circle session.	To keep trying to improve ways to capture authentic learner circle experiences and voice; Continuing to develop my skills, knowledge and experience as an ESOL researcher.
33. Analyse data collected from the circles process.	To carefully reflect on circles experienced by these learners as compared to literature and my own expectations to work towards the key themes and findings and next iteration.

3.3 Research design

The realities of this design are explored in Chapter 4 which contains extracts of completed self-assessments, questionnaires and role sheets for data analysis. Copies of the blank forms are attached as appendices.

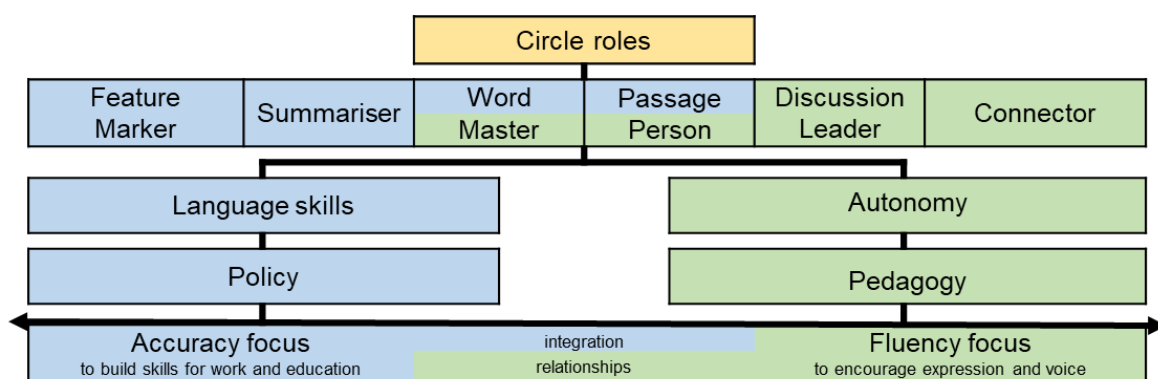
From the students enrolled in my 17/18 and 18/19 E3 classes, 34 and 28 completed the circle process respectively. Hard data regarding any changes in assessed language skills from pre- to post-intervention is drawn from the students'

own self-assessments and mock exam scores. These are the sources of quantitative data used for this study.

Qualitative data comes from the focus group comments and the semi-structured questionnaire which presented open-ended questions. There are also documents gathered from the weekly circle sessions such as field notes, transcriptions of observed discussions, examples of completed role sheets and student diaries.

The decision to use two forms of data is indicative of the two ways in which circles may work and the two ways in which potential outcomes will need to be reported: circles working to improve language exam success rates for management information and to offer an alternative pedagogy for teachers and students. These two perspectives align with the common themes from the Literature Review of national policies and priorities of immigration, the economy and integration in contrast to how classrooms can be places for student-directed conversations for learning, building relationships and sharing understandings about the world lived in and experienced through a dialogic pedagogy. However, it is unlikely that these two viewpoints of ESOL will operate independently of one another, but will flow in and out from each other meaning that both need to be taken into account to build a holistic picture.

The following diagram attempts to illustrate this dual function in a visual form:



3.4 Dual function of integrated circles

The purpose of utilising action research (McNiff, 2014) for this project is as an iterative way to investigate this particular FE workplace issue. The use of narrative accounts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) aims to represent participant experience, whilst quantitative data indicates assessment results.

These combined strategies will help with the reliability and validity of emerging findings. This is particularly important as the focus on qualitative research means it will not be possible to test circle results in the same way as a scientific experiment in the quantitative tradition.

Denscombe (2017) sets out two reasons for this. Firstly, social conditions can never be identically replicated in other places and times. Secondly, the researcher's close involvement in data collection and analysis means that others will be unlikely to produce or interpret the same data in the same way. These points take in the uniqueness of circle conversations and interactions between unique participants, including myself as teacher-researcher. Therefore, it is imperative to offer 'reassurances that the qualitative data have been produced and checked in accord with good practice' (ibid., p.322) which includes participant validation, detailed fieldwork and triangulating data. The three criteria are included in the research plan noted above.

Research Considerations

My own role as teacher and researcher has thrown up some dilemmas for the integrated circle project. The use of action research at my place of work with my student groups placed me squarely inside the research process, rather than a neutral outside observer. Being 'inside' coloured the project before it even started as pragmatic choices were made about the time, place, participants and methods. This set up easy access to participants who knew and trusted me in a context we were all familiar with, but also created dangers of potentially taking the context, opinions of it and each other's roles for granted whereby resulting data could be discredited.

Being so close to the action meant considering key factors to preserve the integrity of the project and its data. Mercer (2007) discusses these types of issues in relation to being an 'insider' researcher. These factors included access, intrusiveness, familiarity, rapport, informant-bias, reciprocity in interviews and research ethics in relation to insider research.

Working with my own student groups gave immediate access to participants and an understanding between us on what ESOL is and what ESOL lessons usually

incorporate based on our shared previous experiences at the FE institution. However, this understanding was based on a traditional teacher-student dynamic which also removed us from each other as did our widely different backgrounds, languages and learning needs. Whilst we were not exactly strangers to each other, by virtue of knowing each other from inside the college, we could never be intimately inside each other's experience as we live separate lives.

Trying to understand the integrated circle process from the participants points of view, presented the danger of my intruding too heavily on their personal efforts to express their own experience of circles. Being language beginners meant they could struggle to articulate their thoughts in English and in an effort to be helpful I could unwittingly put words in their mouth. To overcome this, I made sure I kept quiet in their pauses, let the learners talk out loud to try different words and make their own way towards their ideas, and to use translators. Only when it became clear that to remain silent would mean a conversation collapsing would I offer a choice of words. Learners would check these on their translators and select the expression that best matched their thinking. Another check on this was by always reading back together the information I took down from the students and amending it as directed by them.

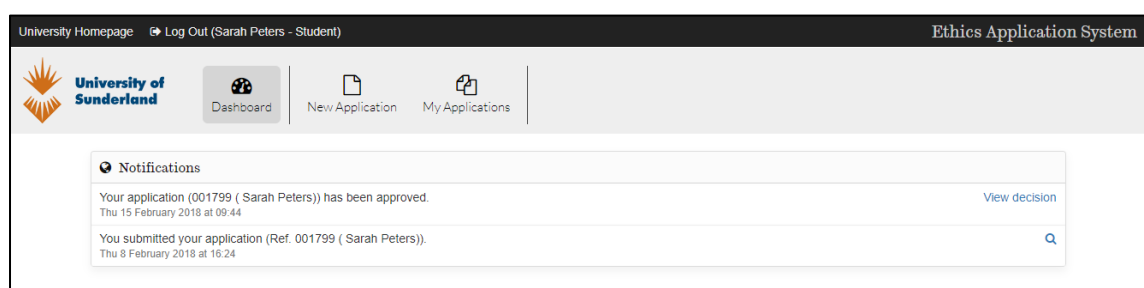
Mercer (*ibid.*, p.12) points out that revising comments gives participants time to reflect on their words and return to them with new thinking which may change their original meaning. In addition, such records from a range of different people may result in accounts so varied that it can be hard to draw any meaningful conclusions. Further, by having a pre-established rapport with the students, it might have been possible that in their feedback they sought to give answers they thought would please me rather than honest truths. To counteract this, questions were included that sought to draw out the negative as well as the positive aspects of circle experiences in both written evaluations and interviews.

I put forward the accounts reported from this project as being reflective of a particular place, in a particular moment in time, representing a situation that may have significance for realities in other classrooms. I suggest that any contradictions can be a useful source of findings and recommendations. It is especially useful as a check against looking for findings that appear to 'fit' the picture that I could be seeking in fulfilment of my own bias towards circles, and to

open the discussion to unexpected or unanticipated issues. This point is discussed further in Chapter 4.

Ethics

I was aware of the need for ethical considerations. I sought and obtained permission at all stages of my research as necessary. This has entailed demonstrating how the study complies with relevant research guidelines and procedures, including BERA (2018), GDPR (2018) and was approved under the University of Sunderland's code of ethics. This step signals that the research process was robust and had integrity.

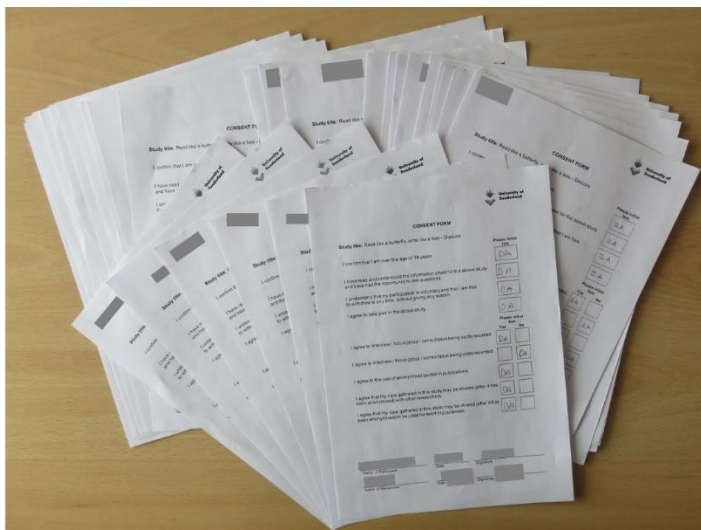


3.5 Ethics Approval

I was acutely aware of the dilemma in undertaking research with ESOL students given their wide variety of languages and my inability to speak any of them. The only language we had in common was English but at vastly different levels of proficiency. Explaining what I was undertaking, why and what it involved in a clear way was crucial to give participants informed choice. I could not expect the learners to sign or decline the consent form by reading the participant information sheet alone. Therefore, I included three tutorial sessions as part of the circle plans to introduce the project information, to revisit it and for the consent process.

The participant information sheet was written with accessible language for E3 ESOL learners with key words in bold to help readers identify key points. We discussed and clarified the process and technical vocabulary together in open class, followed by individual enquiries before the consent form was issued. This was also discussed and clarified in open class, and with individual learners, for informed consent regarding how data collected from them could and could not be used.

I was conscious that the idea of participating in circle research at this stage was still a theoretical concept. Some would need more time to decide if they wished to participate, especially as they had not yet experienced circles and were not aware of what it would entail. Therefore, learners were offered the opportunity to join, or to leave, the research group after they had completed a circle.



3.6 Signed consent forms

Participants were informed specifically about the voluntary nature of the project and that they had the right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Participants chose their own pseudonyms to maintain anonymity. I have redacted all names and dates from data documents presented to reinforce confidentiality.

The documents required to inform participants of the research content and to obtain their consent are attached in the Appendices.

A consideration for being in-circle was the range of backgrounds represented. Students arrive from all over the world, some having experienced trauma rarely disclosed up front. It takes time to build that type of trust – if it develops at all.

The circle method encourages the sharing of personal experiences, particularly the Connector role. There was a real chance of painful things surfacing during group conversations. There was no definitive way to predict if that might happen in an open student-led discussion and no way to prevent it – of controlling the content of free conversations.

The way I considered this was to emphasise in the introductory circle sessions and note-sheet that connections need not be personal. The ground rule was that connections could be impersonal - about other people or from the news. It was always the learner's personal choice to share a direct experience. However, I was conscious that even when someone started to tell with confidence, deep feelings could have erupted without notice. I also stated that I might be legally bound to disclose some matters. Therefore, I was ready to refer to the college's counsellor or safeguarding officer if necessary.

I never needed to refer but I considered and shared the possibility with the students. The dilemma was the risky territory of open conversation where anything could be revealed, by anyone, at any time in contrast to the safety of traditional SfL communication where all students talk about the same topic, in the same way, at the same time.

Another risk was the diversity of countries, languages, cultures and previous experiences which could have been a source of clashes. However, it has always been my experience that ESOL students are well aware of what it means when your country, language and culture are discriminated against so democratic ways of being with others are valued. The classroom itself is a living space of common human values against government policy to impart cultural norms through British Values.

Nevertheless, times of people being together can be times of tension and required me to reflect carefully on my role in proceedings. Nurturing conditions for open conversations did not mean shutting them down at the first signs of discomfort but did mean monitoring for body language, tone of voice and the direction of conversations to be ready to mediate if requested or required.

Anticipated outcomes

From my experience with the previous reading and writing circle projects with ESOL learners at this institution, I was aware of some potential outcomes. This project may or may not reinforce or replicate those findings.

I am interested to see if the reading element continues to encourage fluency gains in word, sentence and text level skills, alongside cultural / human understandings

of texts. I may also understand which of the assessed skills require more attention under the Ascentis awarding organisation's mark scheme.

The writing strand could encourage students to attempt a wider range of writing tasks, albeit in a controlled manner, and develop their spelling, punctuation and grammar accuracy. It may also indicate writing assessment criteria in need of development.

The role of speaking and listening in the circles method was the initial stimulus for this research project. From consideration of relevant literature thus far, I suspect that conversation plays the central role in allowing circles to 'work' by building positive relationships which are the foundations for safe participation in the experience. I expect that student discussions will show caring attitudes towards one another as they express their own critical thinking to evaluate texts and tasks creatively, and respond to critical questions from peers. I anticipate that this collaborative process will enable a cumulative and enriched understanding of language skills and varied points of view.

I believe that I will see students enjoying themselves and revealing a growing confidence based on their growing knowledge and security in using narratives of their own lives for circle discussions. When students speak in their circle they are engaged in telling stories about their own experience. This experience can be dealing with the text as a learning activity to complete their role sheet, or of their life experiences as they connect with the text and their circle friends. The roles encourage a combination of bottom-up and top-down reading and writing. It is probable that these two ways of approaching a text will be found in different roles.

I suspect that bottom-up skills, related to surface level indicators of literacy will be most evident in the Summariser and Feature Marker roles. These roles include processing and piecing together small units of information from the text in order to build up a bigger picture. The information is about key characters, events and genre-specific language features.

The Discussion Leader and Connector roles seem suited to top-down skills; to move thinking and discussion 'beyond the literal' (Clarke, 2001, p.87). Meaning is found by 'relating life with text, text with life, seeing the links' (Carter, 2000, p.2).

The Passage Person and Word Master roles straddle the two methods of information processing. The first includes looking at how to construct a paragraph in a logical order – the technical skill of sequencing information, and reactions to the content – a personal response to characters, events or actions in the text. The second focuses on key vocabulary in the context of the text for simple comprehension, and also to continually develop a personal wordbank with the understanding of there being different words to select from for different contexts in wider life.

The next chapter will give a detailed account of the steps I took to collect data. Then, I will discuss the principles and practices of data analysis I followed with examples of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. From this, emerging patterns are drawn out and presented.

Chapter 4: Data Collection and Analysis

Introduction

This research project, as noted in Chapter 1, grew out of my previous experiences trying circles methods with adult ESOL students at a place of FE. The first encounter came via Furr's (2009) reading circles where I became aware of how students talking together about their reading appeared to help improve general reading skills. The second opportunity to explore circles with ESOL students focused on writing (Gunnery, 2007) which indicated student discussions played a similar role there. I couldn't shake the idea that something meaningful was happening for second language learners in circles through the power of conversation, although I could not exactly say what, how or why, which left me wanting to investigate circles and the questions it raised for ESOL education more deeply.

In this chapter I wish to give an account of the steps I took to undertake the investigation. Then, I will explain my approach to analysing the resulting data before presenting key areas of impact. This will enable me to introduce the key concepts emerging from the data and possible general conclusions.

This chapter is organised in four parts. Firstly, I set out the actions taken, when and where they were taken and with whom. This shows where the data came from. I also remind the reader of how I collected the data in this setting. I include a discussion of how I had to adapt the investigation process to respond to changes in organisational practice. I arrange this first part of the chapter around the two academic years I actively collected data in 2017/18 and 2018/19.

The second part of the chapter sets out the principles and practices of data analysis I followed. In the opening section, I consider the challenges of qualitative data analysis drawing on the work of Flyvberg (2004) to think through making room for issues and themes to 'shine out' in the data while looking out for subjective bias. The later part of this section sets out the iterative approach to data analysis, showing how my data analysis was guided by practitioner-researcher reflexivity on the literature I had read and the integrated circles I had witnessed and experienced.

The third part of the chapter gives examples of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. From this, emerging patterns are drawn out and presented.

Finally, I summarise the key aspects of impact. These are the important issues for Chapter 5 that form the discussion of the themes and findings from the ESOL integrated circle investigation regarding the role of conversation and implications for learner autonomy. They establish the points to follow in Chapter 6 with conclusions and recommendations.


Part 1: Data collection

2017/18: A close-up shot of the integrated circle

The integrated circle concept arose from my curiosity about the role conversation plays in reading and writing circles. My focus at this time was on the circle process as a classroom method and how the circle roles might help ESOL students develop language skills. My first task was to settle on the significant overlaps between the two circle methods and consider how these could be drawn together. The overarching similarity between Furr (2009) and Gunnery (2007) is the use of roles with note-taking sheets.

The first step was to compare and contrast the roles and the note-sheets and to combine them into a set that combined the two skills: to support reading and to highlight key elements useful in writing. The notes students make about these areas from the perspectives of their circle roles become their circle discussion prompts. These became the integrated roles presented in Chapter 2, diagram 2.14.

The accompanying role-note sheets were drafted with ESOL learners in mind. The integrated circle begins with learners reading a text out of class. It was important that the take-home instructions were as clear as possible so that learners could complete their reading role independently and return to class prepared for discussion. All role sheets are contained in Appendix E. I include the Discussion Leader role sheet instructions here as an example:

 Discussion Leader	Text: <hr/>
<p>Your role has two parts:</p> <p>1. You First, read or listen to this week's text. Find the key theme, topic and ideas in the text. Write one question for each of the other roles. Complete the notes below.</p> <p>2. Circle Start the discussion by explaining the theme, topic and ideas in the text. Explain why you think that is important. Ask your questions. Make sure everyone joins in the discussion. Ask each member to present their information. Keep the discussion going!</p>	

4.1 Discussion Leader role instructions 17/18

In addition to supporting independent reading and free thinking ahead of the student-led circle discussion, the roles had to be designed in such a way as to take the tight assessment criteria into consideration – after all, the ESOL classroom is a place to work towards SfL exams. To find the links between an integrated circle and the required assessment criteria I made a map of the awarding bodies' unit specifications to the circle roles which forms part of the discussion in Chapter 5.

I looked at the specifications for '*ESB Entry Level Award in ESOL Skills for Life*' for reading (2016a), speaking and listening (2016b) and writing (2016c) to ascertain the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for SfL exams due in the academic year 2017/18. Each ESOL mode of reading, writing, speaking and listening has its own respective ESB reference table linked to the SfL AECC (DfES, 2001). I mapped the tables to the circles roles and used the same map with Ascentis in 18/19 as it follows the same assessment criteria.

This step was taken to evidence how the integrated circle process was relevant to the institutional requirements of ESOL teaching and learning. It was a way to indicate that the investigation was not a personal pet project but held a pedagogical value for accurate language learning for managers authorising my time on the project. I also shared the assessment criteria with participants (Appendix D).

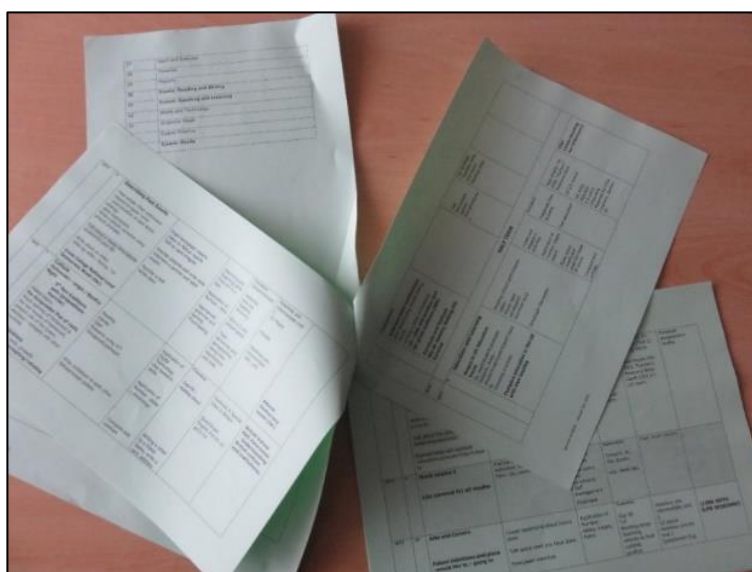
I was aware of the need to maintain the balance between working towards exams with narrow and controlled texts and tasks, with opportunities for a more reciprocal

experience with a wider range of resources. This resulted in lessons that incorporated a mix of standard SfL, graded and authentic texts.

Past experience had taught me that it takes time to 'bed in' the circles concept with learners: a lesson upheld by Furr (ibid.) and Gunnery (ibid.) in Chapter 2. Therefore, a preparatory phase was added to this iteration to introduce and practice the 6 circle roles in whole class before allocating them as individual tasks to individual students.

In order to measure any changes in skills against the ESB criteria, the participants took sample SfL assessments before and after the circle programme. To reflect their own changing opinions of personal language abilities, self-assessments were undertaken before and after. They were also encouraged to keep a learning diary each week to reflect on feelings, thinking and progress in class as well as opportunities for independent practice. The diary page included prompts adapted from the discussion questions (Coffield, 2008, p.64) used in the initial preparation session that sought to gain an insight into the participants' own voice on what makes good ESOL learning. This was a useful check against my looking for themes or outcomes I hoped to find, either in support of my previous reading and writing circle iterations or new views developing through this current process.

The resulting integrated circle plan was designed to link with the institution's existing SfL scheme of work (documents 4.2 and 4.3).




4.2 SfL Scheme of Work

Week	Integrated Circle (IC) topic	IC Stimulus	IC Source	Link(s) to institution's SfL scheme of work	ESB text type	
1	08/01/18	Preparation: IC Learner Voice; Research information 1	Questionnaires adapted from Coffield, F. (2008), p.64	Coffield, F. (2008) <i>Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority</i> London: LSN, p.64	Diagnostic testing; Study skills; Express views and opinions	Form / Questionnaire
2	15/01/18	Initial assessment - Reading			Formative assessment – Reading Mock 1	Sample reading exam
3	22/01/18	Initial assessment - Writing			Formative assessment – Writing Mock 1	Sample writing exam
4	29/01/18	Initial Assessment - Speaking & Listening			Formative assessment - Speaking & Listening Mock 1	Sample S&L exam
5	05/02/18	Preparation: Introduction to IC roles and diaries; Research information 2	'The Pepper Tree' - extract from authentic story	Lindop, C. (2008) <i>Doors to a wider place: Stories from Australia</i> . Oxford: OUP, p.38	Making arrangements: negotiating, persuading, agreeing & disagreeing; Group discussion	Oral presentation
	12/02/18	HALF-TERM				
6	19/02/18	Research consent; Practise 1: Word Master & Feature Marker	'Dick Whittington' - adapted authentic story	https://worldstories.org.uk/reader/dick-whittington-and-his-cat/english/244	Using dictionaries; selecting vocabulary; understanding layout; Describing past events; write a simple narrative	Description
7	26/02/18	Practise 2: Discussion Leader & Summariser	Tutor's 3 oral stories	Peters, S. (2018) 'Talking about the future'. <i>HP TESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished	Future intentions and plans - will; present continuous; going to; Giving a presentation	Oral presentation / role play
8	05/03/18	Practise 3: Passage Person & Connector	Race for Life - authentic article	<i>Bridlington Free Press</i> (2012) 'Brid Race for Life is open for entries' 14 June, p.30	Charities: Explain types of charities; talk about ways of collecting / donating money	Form
9	12/03/18	Practise 4: 6 text types	6 sample texts adapted from past exam tasks	Cambridge ESOL Entry 3 Certificate in ESOL SfL [Reading] Sample (20/09/04) & 0787 / Test 051 (2005)	Practice of past exam papers	Reading exam

10	19/03/18	IC1: Going to extremes	'Going up, going down' - graded article	Acklam, R. & Crace, A. (2005) <i>Total English Pre-Intermediate</i> , Harlow, Essex: Longman, p.36	Adjectives / comparatives to describe personality	Reading skills
	26/03/18	EASTER				
	02/04/18	EASTER				
11	09/04/18	IC2: Changing bodies	'The perfect body' - graded article	Acklam, R. & Crace, A. (2005) <i>Total English Pre-Intermediate</i> , Harlow, Essex: Longman, p.66	Adjectives / comparatives to describe physical appearance	Informal letter of description
12	16/04/18	IC3: Food	'Fields of Gold' - authentic article	<i>Tesco Food Family Living</i> (2013) 'Fields of Gold', (September), p.40	Describing food; healthy eating	Formal letter of complaint
13	23/04/18	1C4: Phrasal verbs	Tutor's oral story	Peters, S. (2018) 'Relationships in my family'. <i>HP TESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished	Describing relationships	Article
14	30/04/18	1C5: Work	'Vusi Makusi' - authentic short story	http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/VusiMaku899.shtml	Jobs and careers: talk about job satisfaction, write about skills and qualities	Descriptive report
15	07/05/18	1C6: Evaluation	Feedback from IC Introduction week	Completed participants' questionnaires / views from week 1	Identifying different report types; write a report with headings and paragraphs	Evaluative report
16	14/05/18	Project end assessment - Reading			Formative assessment - Reading Mock 2 preparation for summative assessment	Sample reading exam
17	21/05/18	Project end assessment - Writing			Formative assessment - Writing Mock 2 preparation for summative assessment	Sample writing exam
	28/05/18	HALF-TERM				
18	04/06/18	Project end assessment - Speaking & Listening			Formative assessment - Speaking & Listening Mock 2 preparation for summative assessment	Sample S&L exam

4.3 Integrated circle plan 17/18

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Circles Diary</h2>	Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____
Text: _____		
My Circle Role (✓ one box): <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Leader <input type="checkbox"/> Passage Person <input type="checkbox"/> Word Master <input type="checkbox"/> Summariser <input type="checkbox"/> Connector <input type="checkbox"/> Feature Marker		
Feelings ● What did I enjoy? ● What made me happiest? ● What did I dislike?		
Thinking ● What made me really think? ● What new things did I learn? ● Which ESB skills were easy for me to use? ● Which ESB skills do I need to practise more?		
Progress ● What helped this week when I had a problem? ● How do I know my English is improving? ● What will I do next to keep improving?		
Other English texts ● What other English texts did I read, write, speak or listen to this week? ● What did I learn from the other texts?		

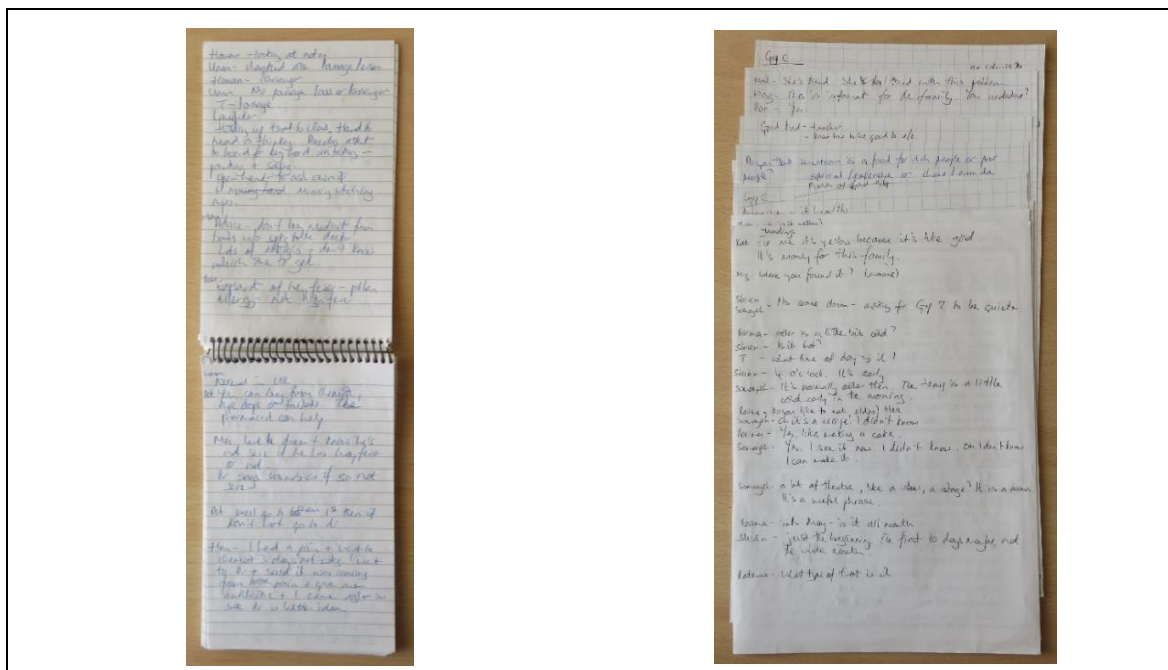
4.4 Integrated circle diary pro-forma 17/18

However, due to unforeseen late changes to the college's exam timetable, the integrated circle schedule had to be adapted. This meant that the mock exams planned for the end of the 6-week circle sessions had to take place mid-way through.

Each week I took on the role of teacher-participant. I was actively engaged in presenting the texts and tasks, setting the discussion groups in action, listening to offer help, bringing the groups back to whole class as the conversations came to an end and moving into the follow-up tasks.

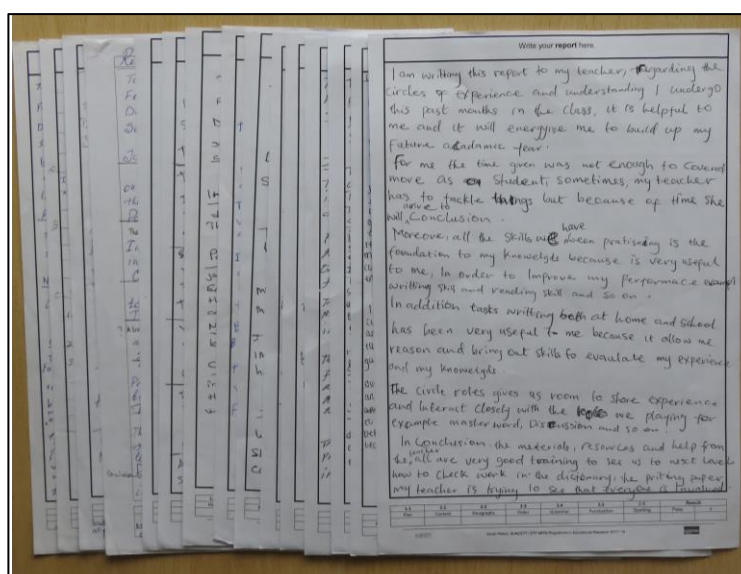
I was also the researcher. I took notes of the things I saw and heard. At first, I recorded what I was witnessing in the classroom in a shorthand notebook. I

changed this in favour of A4 paper as that gave more space for notes and was more comfortable to use without the notebook spiral binding. The note sheets were filed in sequence of the circle sessions they related to. These became my field notes.



4.5 Field notes 17/18

My own notes were a supplement to student feedback on their own experiences. Such feedback included spoken comments made in the weekly sessions or from their final written evaluative report.



4.6 Participant Evaluations 17/18

Reflecting on what the participants told me about their own experiences, what I experienced myself as the teacher-participant, witnessed as the teacher-researcher, and what the assessment results revealed informed the second iteration in 18/19.

In the first year, I was concerned with collecting sufficient data to consider against professional literature, as well as my practical experience of circles. This was because my thinking was still focused on the working method. All students enrolled in my adult E3 SfL classes were invited to join the project. This potentially meant 65 participants.

The plan to collect a range of quantitative and qualitative data followed three stages: pre-circle, in-circle and post-circle:

1. 17/18 Pre-circle

Focus group on what helps or hinders ESOL learning.

Focus group follow-up questionnaire.

Participants to self-evaluate ability against ESB reading, writing, speaking and listening criteria.

Calculate an average numerical score of pre-circle self-assessed ability.

Participants complete a mock ESB exam in all ESOL modes.

Calculate the average numerical score against the criteria.

2. 17/18 In-circle

Take photocopies of weekly role note sheets.

Observe, take notes and type up weekly circle discussions.

Take photocopies of weekly student reflection diaries.

3. 17/18 Post-circle

Participants to self-evaluate ability against ESB reading, writing, speaking and listening criteria.

Calculate an average numerical score of self-assessed ability.

Participants complete a mock ESB exam in all ESOL modes.

Calculate the average numerical score against the criteria.

Participants write a report of their circle experience.

However, undertaking this collection with all 65 participants would have generated an amount of data that would have been impossible to collate and analyse given the 6-week time frame and commitments to working full-time with other student groups studying for other ESOL SfL levels. In addition, changes to my timetable were made by the institution as it implemented new administrative procedures to closely manage classroom activity under 'fresh start'. In order for data collection to be realistic and achievable, I focused on 34 participants. This was a pragmatic choice.

These participants were followed because they completed the full circle cycle of 6 roles within the parameters of the research design. They fulfilled the brief, established in Chapter 3, of being adult learners aged over 19 years; learning English as a second or other language; enrolled in an E3 ESOL class; and able to participate during their usual college time. They gave their informed and signed consent. Each participant chose their own pseudonym to personalise their participation and to respect confidentiality and anonymity.


As this year progressed and the participants shared their view of general ESOL classes compared with circle classes with me, I began to make inroads into the role of conversation as a means by which learners could learn to learn together and build learning relationships. This gave a new direction for the year 2018/19.

2018/19: A wider angle

By this time, I was becoming increasingly aware of the importance of conversation and community in circles. In this year, I was concerned with collecting data to consider against theoretical as well as the professional literature and my practical experience of circles within the research context. The college had moved to a different awarding body, Ascentis. The previous map of assessment criteria to circle roles was retained as Ascentis use the same QCF framework as ESB. This is contained in '*Ascentis Awards and Certificates in ESOL Skills for Life (Speaking and Listening, Reading, Writing) Specification Entry 1, Entry 2, Entry 3, Level 1, Level 2*' (2017).

The first change was to amend the role note-sheets in an attempt to make them easier to follow independently at home, but also in response to my developing view of circles from experience, and learning from the literature review. An

example of the amended Discussion Leader role sheet is included here. The role icon changed to highlight the discussion point of this role, rather than the 17/18 icon that exaggerated a leader's position:

 Discussion Leader	Text: _____
<p>Your role has two parts:</p> <p>1. You First, read or listen to the text. Find the key theme, topic and ideas in the text. Write one question for each of the other roles. Complete the notes below.</p> <p>2. Circle Start the discussion by explaining the theme, topic and ideas in the text. Explain why you think that is important. Ask your questions. Make sure everyone joins in the discussion. Ask each member to present their information. Keep the discussion going!</p>	

4.7 Discussion Leader role instructions 18/19

Given the change in 17/18 internal assessment dates, the integrated circle plan (document 4.8) was amended to incorporate earlier self-assessment to try to overcome any potential last minute change to 18/19 mock dates that could influence learner feedback. The dilemma of this was to decide which sessions should stay given the new circle timeline and the need to maintain the SfL timetable. As the circle process relies so much on learner experience, the decision was made to remove the three whole class role introductory sessions so that learners could begin practise quickly, but with more teacher support in the initial meetings to help learners complete their role-sheets and discussions. This meant, as the teacher, I had to make careful choices in allocating initial circle roles so that students could comfortably complete their tasks. Three additional circle sessions were added for more independent practise as the participants became more skilled in the process. The longer-term linking of circles with SfL resulted in a plan for the academic year, rather than the short 17/18 insertion.

The stimulus materials and follow-up tasks were amended in response to 17/18 assessment results. These appeared to show a need for more controlled speaking and listening support, in order for students to meet that particular assessment criteria successfully.

Pre- and post-circle self-assessments and sample Ascentis assessments were taken by participants again.

Week	Integrated Circle (IC) topic	IC Stimulus	IC Source	Link(s) to institution's SFL scheme of work	Ascentis text type	
1	03/09/18			Introductions and Induction	Instructional & informative text	
2	10/09/18	Preparation: Learner Self-Assessment – Writing; Research information 1	Tutor's writing self-assessment record sheet	Peters, S. (2018) 'ESOL Entry 3 Ascentis Writing Self-Assessment'. <i>HPTESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished	Diagnostic testing; Study skills; Express views and opinions	Form / Questionnaire; Discussion
3	17/09/18	Preparation: Learner Self-Assessment – Reading	Tutor's reading self-assessment record sheet	Peters, S. (2018) 'ESOL Entry 3 Ascentis Reading Self-Assessment'. <i>HPTESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished	Diagnostic testing; Study skills; Express views and opinions	Form / Questionnaire; Discussion
4	24/09/18	Preparation: Learner Self-Assessment – Speaking & Listening	Tutor's speaking and listening self-assessment record sheets	Peters, S. (2018) 'ESOL Entry 3 Ascentis Speaking and Listening Self-Assessment'. <i>HPTESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished	Diagnostic testing; Study skills; Express views and opinions	Form / Questionnaire; Discussion
5 - 8	01 – 22 /10/18			Present Simple & Continuous; Present Perfect; Past Perfect; Intensifiers; Expressing opinions	Narrative Account Discussion	
	29/10/18	HALF-TERM				
9	05/11/18	Diagnostic – Writing		Formative assessment – Writing 1	Sample writing exam	
10	12/11/18	Diagnostic – Reading		Formative assessment – Reading 1	Sample reading exam	
11	19/11/18	Preparation: Introduction to self-reflection and diaries; Learner Voice; Research information 2	Tutor's Ppt	Peters, S. (2018) 'Diary'. <i>HPTESL31-1</i> . Research site. Unpublished; Clarke, S. (2001) <i>Unlocking Formative Assessment</i> . London: Hodder Education; Coffield, F. (2008) <i>Just suppose teaching and learning became the first priority</i> London: LSN, p.64	Induction: Group discussion; agreeing & disagreeing	Oral presentation; Form / Questionnaire

12	26/11/18	Research consent; Preparation: Introduction to IC roles	Writing Task 2: Informal Letter	University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Cambridge ESOL Entry 3 Certificate in ESOL Skills for Life [Writing], SAMPLE PAPER November 2004	Making arrangements: negotiating, persuading, agreeing & disagreeing; Group discussion	Oral presentation; Informal letter
13	03/12/18	IC1: Travel	Hack - adapted graded account	Tilbury, A., Clementson, T., Hendra, L. A. Rea, D. (2010) English Unlimited: Pre-intermediate Coursebook., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.36	Linking words: after, as, during, later, then, when; Grammar: Past Simple and Past Continuous	Informal letter
14	10/12/18	IC2: Education and Work	Studying? Is it worth it? - adapted graded article	Crace, A & Wileman, R (2002) <i>Language To Go – Intermediate: Student's Book</i> . Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, pp.10-11	Jobs and careers: talk about job satisfaction, write about skills and qualities	Article
15	17/12/18	IC3: Housing	A New Home - adapted graded complaint letter	Tilbury, A., Clementson, T., Hendra, L. A. Rea, D. (2010) English Unlimited: Pre-intermediate Coursebook., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.96	Problems in the home: making a formal written complaint	Formal letter of complaint
	24/12/18	CHRISTMAS				
	31/12/18	CHRISTMAS				
16	07/01/19	IC4: Travel 1	Ming Chen - SfL audio & transcript	DfES (2003), Skills for Life, <i>Teacher Reference File</i> , Entry 3, Unit 4, Audio Script, p.19; Audio CD E3A Track 28	Travelling and transport: Listening to extract information; Making a formal oral complaint	Oral complaint
17	14/01/19	Initial assessment – Writing & Listening			Formative assessment – Writing 2 / Listening 1	Sample writing exam & listening task
18	21/01/19	Initial assessment – Reading & Speaking			Formative assessment – Reading 2 / Speaking 1	Sample reading exam & speaking task

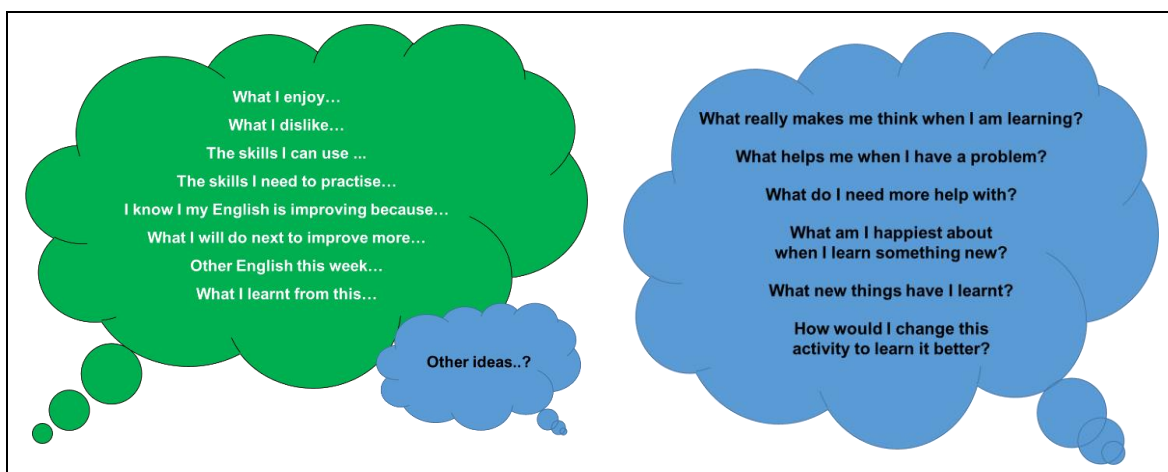
19	28/01/19	IC5: Travel 2	World's Greatest Travellers - adapted graded account	C. Redston & G. Cunningham (2013) <i>Face to Face: Intermediate Student's Book</i> , CUP; C. Redston & G. Cunningham (2013), <i>Face to Face: Upper Intermediate Student's Book</i> , CUP	Describing places: Language to compare and contrast	Account
20	04/02/19	IC6: The Secret Garden	The Secret Garden - graded listening & fiction	Hodgson Burnett, F. (2008) <i>The Secret Garden</i> - Macmillan Readers. Retold by Rachel Bladon. Available at: https://www.onestopenglish.com/listening/the-secret-garden-chapter-1/550663.article	Housing: Discuss pictures; Explanations of differences between housing in different countries; Listening skills; Reading comprehension	Listening
21	11/02/19	IC7: Health: Giving advice	Advice - adapted graded letters asking for and giving advice	Cunningham, G & Mohamed, S. (2002) <i>Language to Go: Pre-Intermediate Student's Book</i> , Essex: Longman, pp.56-57	Health: symptoms; the body Grammar: adjectives ending -ed / -ing	Role play
	18/02/19	HALF-TERM				
22	25/02/19	IC8: Health: Lifestyle choices	Change4Life - authentic listening	Aardman Animations (2009) <i>Change4Life</i> . Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvzfSmb0YOQ	Health: Listening; Ask questions; Express views clearly; Respect views of others	Presentation and Discussion
23	04/03/19	IC9: Television	Vocabulary matching - adapted graded resource	Available at: https://www.englishwsheets.com/tv-programmes-1.html	Media and technology: Topic vocabulary; Passive grammar; Report layout	Comparative report
24	11/03/19	IC10: Evaluation	Feedback from IC Introduction week	Completed participants' questionnaires / views from week 1	Reports: Identifying different report types; write a report with headings and paragraphs	Evaluative report
25	18/03/19	Project end assessment - Reading			Formative assessment - Reading & preparation for year-end assessments	Sample reading exam
26	25/03/19	Project end assessment - Writing			Formative assessment - Writing & preparation for year-end assessments	Sample writing exam
27	01/04/19	Project end assessment - Speaking & Listening			Formative assessment - Speaking & Listening & preparation for year-end assessments	Sample S&L exam

	08/04/19	EASTER				
	15/04/19	EASTER				
28	22/04/19	Revision 1	Time to Travel - adapted graded text	Lee, R.C (2019) <i>When I Retire, We Will See the World</i> . Available at: www.rong-chang.com/qa2/stories/story099.htm	Exam practice: Reading, Speaking & Listening, Writing	Narrative; Listening, Presentation and Discussion; Account
29	29/04/19	Revision 2			Preparation for year-end assessments	Sample tasks for all exam modes
30 - 32	06 - 20 /05/19	Ascentis exams			Year-end assessment	Live papers 1
	27/05/19	HALF-TERM				
33	03/06/19	Exam 1 results; resit timetable; exit interviews			Year-end assessment; Progression	Form
34 - 35	10 & 17 /06/19	Resit 1			Year-end assessment	Live papers 2
36	24/06/19	Resit 2			Year-end assessment	Live papers 3

4.8 Integrated circle plan 18/19

The learning diaries were also adapted. The range of self-reflection points had been challenging for learners to complete independently at home so they had either not completed the sheet, or asked for peer and teacher support to fill it in at the beginning of the following session. However, trying to seek out learners' views of the circle process for their own learning seemed important for me not just as the researcher, but as the teacher. This is given value by Clarke (2001) and Lipman (2003), who in Chapter 2 of this thesis, indicate the power of learner self-evaluation and champion this through learner-generated questions respectively. Both writers highlight learner self-evaluation as a way for students to share and learn from the thoughts, problems and successes of others, and to build self-esteem in learning ability.

Therefore, as part of the preparatory sessions, I added a specific session in which the students chose the key self-evaluative questions they would reflect on. The questions were agreed from a sample adapted from Coffield (2008, p.64), plus any other important factors the students wished to add. Clarke (2001, p.41) was used for supportive examples:



4.9 Sample self-evaluative questions 18/19

The participants settled on twelve areas from the sample. As the teacher, I paired up the twelve areas to create 6 reflective themes. The 6 themes were typed up and laminated. The questions were known as 'Today's thoughts':

 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>What I enjoyed...</p> <p>What I disliked...</p>	 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>The skills I can use...</p> <p>The skills I need to practise...</p>	 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>I know my English is improving because...</p> <p>What I will do next to improve more...</p>
 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>What really made me think today was...</p> <p>What really helped me today was...</p>	 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>The new things I have learnt today are...</p> <p>I feel ...</p>	 <p>Today's thoughts:</p> <p>Other English this week...</p> <p>What I learnt from this...</p>

4.10 Participant-selected self-reflection questions 18/19

Each week, at the beginning of the circle session, I randomly chose a student to blindly draw one of the six cards. The selected card was displayed on the whiteboard for the duration of the session as the focus for self-reflection for each student for the week. This adaptation reduced the range of points participants were self-reflecting on and lessened the cognitive load of the task at any one time. It still gave participants the opportunity to think about their learning and gave the teacher insights in participants' views and needs.

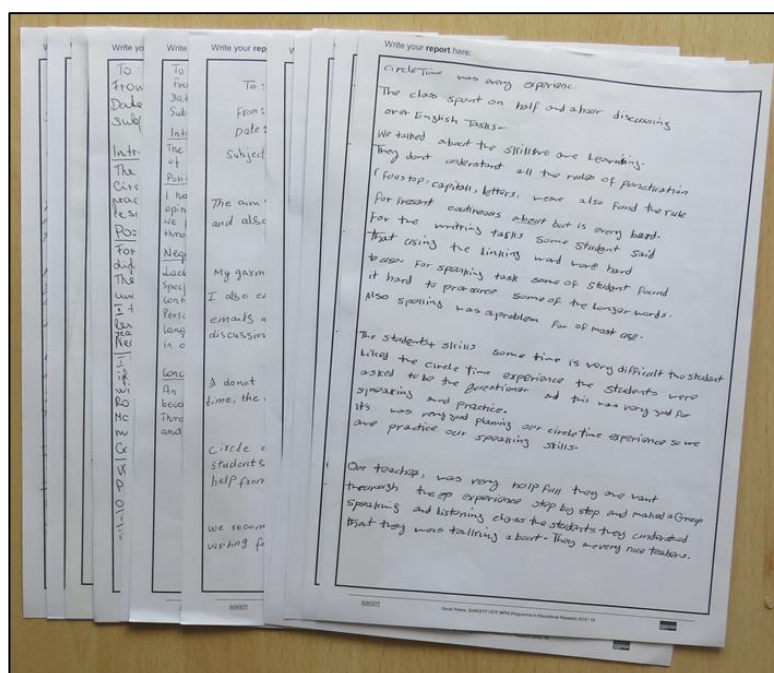
Self-reflections were completed in class at the end of each session. There was an incentive for participants to complete the diary as a teacher-monitored task. Reflecting in class also meant there was support available, if required, from peers and the teacher to help participants find the language to transfer thoughts to paper.

The paper diary was based on the layout of the institution's RARPA sheets. The participants were familiar with the process of updating RARPA records at the end of each standard SfL class:

My Progress and Review		RARPA stage 4
Date	Progress and review (tutor and student comments)	Future work / new targets
	Text: Role:	
Thoughts:		

4.11 Integrated circle diary pro-forma 18/19

I continued to keep my own notes of what I could see and hear in the circle classroom. Further, I was able to gain access to a video recorder for this iteration and a circle discussion group gave consent to be filmed. A transcript was made to illustrate an example of a live circle in action. Participants also wrote an end of project evaluation report:



4.12 Participant evaluations 18/19

In addition, I interviewed 6 participants, individually, as the number that make up a circle group. The literature review had raised some key themes to discuss with the participants in order to check how theoretical views relate to the realities of circle practice, or what differences could be found. The themes provided the basis of a

series of semi-structured questions initially focused on circle questions (Duncan, 2014, p.30).

I was still engaged in my literature review as the interviews commenced. I realised through ideas I encountered in theoretical and practical texts, and responses from participants, that my initial questions were failing to take account of the complexities of the circle process and its potential impact adequately. I added a new layer of questioning from themes emerging from theoretical literature. I made a note of key ideas from the literature as a reminder for myself of themes that might or might not surface with participants.

In addition, as language beginners, trying to express their views in a new language, participants were offered reminders of the circle experience with physical examples of the circle resources used. Familiar key topic words were also offered as prompts as a way to help participants express complex ideas whilst taking care not to alter the meaning of their words. All records taken of the interview sessions were read back privately to each participant for accuracy or amendment.

A benefit of using an action research approach is its flexibility and ability to adapt with the changing research environment. Consequently, I was able to extend the questions for interviews yet to take place and go back to those that had taken place for further insights. The final structure for the interviews is reproduced below:

Questions for integrated circle participants

- **Background Questions**

Name	Date started learning	Previous work / situation	Motivation
Age	English	Current work / situation	Future plans
Gender	Where previously studied		
Nationality	Previous exams		
Language(s)			
Issues			

- **Circle Questions: Individual view of collective process and personal progress**

General

How did you feel about the circle method? What made it enjoyable / not enjoyable?
 What did you get from being part of a circle group?
 What was your break-through moment?
 What surprised you?

Texts, Tasks & Roles

Which texts, tasks and roles did you enjoy? Why?
 Which texts, tasks and roles were not enjoyable? Why not?

Reminders – Take physical copies to interview		
Texts	Tasks	Roles
Hack (Taxi driver)	Informal Letter	Discussion Leader
Career Paths (Gavin & Carl)	Article	Summariser
A New Home	Formal Letter - Complaint 1	Word Master
Ming Chan (Train journey audio)	Formal Letter - Complaint 2	Passage Person
The World's Greatest Travellers	Account – Important life events	Connector
The Secret Garden (Audio)	Reading Qs	Feature Marker
Irritating Illnesses	Advice Letters	
Change for Life (Audio)	Advice	
TV in Mexico	Report writing	
Time to Travel	Recorded session	

Skills

How do you think your English skills have improved for college? Why?
 How do you think your English skills have improved for wider life? **Prompt: work, family, friends, shopping, doctor, etc.** Why?

Personal

How have your literacy practices & confidences changed?
 What impact has there been on your Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening habits?
 What impact has there been on your attitudes towards Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening?

Thinking: Lipman

How did the circle help you think:	Reminders / Prompts
critically?	own ability; questions about texts, tasks, issues, peers & self
creatively?	new ideas & language; trying out new ways to learn and express self
caringly?	different reactions & connections; respecting peers' contributions
collaboratively?	sharing views, questions & answers can build understanding

Dialogue

What was helpful about talking with others? Why do you think the discussions were helpful?
Sennett, i.e. listening well, collaboration, non-linear conversational paths, impersonal language

What was unhelpful about talking with others? Why do you think the discussions failed?
Burbules, i.e. different people, places, modes of communication, intents, understandings

Social cohesion

How has it helped you outside the classroom?
 What has being part of the circle taught you about living in Britain? **Prompt: British Values visual - Democracy; The rule of law; Individual liberty; Mutual respect; Tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs.**

Future

How could the circle be improved?
 Do you think it should be used in college? Why / Why not?
 Who should know about the circle method? Who should use it?

4.13 Interview questions 18/19

In this year, I collected data with the aim of illuminating real-life student experience of circle conversations, compared to theoretical and professional literature.

Learning from 17/18 and the issue of volume in data collection, a decision was made to limit participant numbers from the outset.

I focused on 28 participants. As 17/18, these students met the criteria of the research design and they completed the full circle cycle of 6 roles. They gave their informed and signed consent and chose a pseudonym to personalise and anonymise their participation.

The data collection plan followed the three pre-circle, in-circle and post-circle stages. The same steps were taken as 17/18, with the addition of a circle discussion video and transcript and the semi-structured interviews.

As this year progressed, I continued to balance practical classroom work with the work of an academic inquiry. I continued to collect feedback from participants and there was the ongoing regular feedback from my university supervisor, along with the Annual Monitoring Review. The latter focused on my emerging theme of learners learning together. This opened up a more panoramic view of circles in terms of theories of learning and learner autonomy in the final year 2019/20, as well as the role of the teacher.

Data Collection: Summary

From the years 17/18 and 18/19, I actively collected a range of data from 62 participants from a mixture of electronic and paper documents. The discussion in Chapter 3 includes how the type of data collected suited a mixed methods design as it came from both quantitative and qualitative sources. This is illustrated in the following chart:

Quantitative data	17/18	18/19	Total	Qualitative data	17/18	18/19	Total
Self-assessments reading	31	15	46	Focus group feedback & questionnaires	30	14	44
Self-assessments writing	29	15	44	Role sheets	148	137	285
Self-assessments speaking and listening	30	15	45	Participant diaries	36	173	209
Mock exam results reading	21	23	44	Field notes	6	10	16
Mock exam results writing	19	21	40	Video transcript		1	1
Mock exam results speaking and listening	30	16	46	Participant evaluations	12	11	23
				Participant interviews		6	6

4.14 Sources of data

Moving on to 19/20, my focus turned to locating circles within an enduring educational issue. I had been thinking and drafting my writing about how circles can help learners learn independently with the concept of learner autonomy hiding in plain sight. This year was an opportunity to look at the circles process anew, under the light of relevant literature, in order to investigate the presence of learner autonomy in the data collected. My next step was to consider how to analyse and present the data in keeping with an academic inquiry, which is where this thesis now turns.

Part 2: Principles and practices of data analysis

Introduction

The actions taken over the years 17/18 and 18/19 generated the data set I have analysed for this integrated circles project. There is a large pool of data to consider that comes from examples of self-assessments, formal internal assessments, circle role sheets, learning diaries, participant evaluations, a transcript, semi-structured interviews and field notes. There is much to consider to analyse the data to work towards the important findings. I have relied on the article by Flyvberg (2004) who, although writing about case study research in particular, provides useful quotes and ideas that can be transposed into the arena of data analysis.

Firstly, I am building on my previous circle projects that had some success in supporting ESOL learners develop their reading and writing. The draw to investigate circles deeply was my unshakable feeling that something more was going on in the process than the reading and writing practice alone could account for. That feeling was an intuition. Flyvberg (ibid., p.397) notes, from his own records of an interview he undertook with Hubert Dreyfus, that intuition enables us to see a:

...case because it shines, but I'm afraid that is not much help. You just have to be intuitive. We all can tell what is a better or worse case – of a Cézanne painting, for instance. But I can't think there could be any rules for deciding what makes Cézanne a paradigmatic modern painter. ... [I]t is a big problem in a democratic society where people are supposed to justify

what their intuitions are. In fact, nobody really can justify what their intuition is. So you have to make up reasons, but it won't be the real reasons.

Sensing 'a case' for circles might have been the key driver for this project, but it could never have been enough alone. The issue is that having a strong instinct is not generally looked upon as a solid basis for a sound investigation. Research that stems from it will be:

called upon to take account for that selection...in collectively acceptable ways...even though intuition may be the real, or most important reason why the researcher wants to execute the project (ibid, p.397).

I cannot disguise the fact that intuition instigated integrated circles. The role of conversation in the reading and writing circles I had previously experienced had 'shone out' to me and kick-started the integrated investigation. It continues to play a role in data analysis. There are moments that 'shine out' to me as the teacher, on-the-spot, in the circle classroom. There are other moments that 'shine out' to me as the researcher looking on. These moments may be different to those that 'shine out' for participants, who may have registered their own unique shining moments. There are moments that come to the fore after the actual event, following a period of reflection.

Intuition is a vital part of this particular research project. Intuition, in the form of professional instinct, recognises the role of the teacher as someone well-placed to understand and respond to real-time learning needs, rather than those prescribed by policy, and to recognise that learners have a stake in their own education and a voice to express it. Intuition, from a research perspective, opens up ways to begin the investigation, and to find the useful lines of inquiry to follow, to think about how different people might see the same things differently and to explore what these differences could mean.

Looking at the sources of circle data there are aspects which 'shine' which I am drawn to intuitively as significant for circles: things that feature strong in my memory or are easily recalled as I sort through the data. Although I recognise these things as powerful, it is difficult to give a robust justification as to why they, in

particular, are important. This is a dilemma in qualitative research because it is not possible to give clear-cut arguments for human experience but it is clear that some actions and reactions stand out. These are the things that draw my attention and contribute to the project's data analysis and discussion, but I must guard against those things being the ones I want or expect to see. I have to be aware of my own predisposition towards the circle method and the pitfall of only seeking out positive aspects whilst failing to take into account any shortcomings, and what participants have to say about the experience.

The use of action research underscored this dilemma. Firstly, action research does not come from a tradition of visiting a setting in order to observe, collect and analyse to make generalisations for others from a neutral position. I was a living member of the setting and the observations made were to illustrate a specific situation from which comparisons may or may not be drawn by others.

I was deeply involved in the process, not just by being 'inside' the setting, but by being 'inside' the investigation as the teacher and the researcher. My knowledge and experience of teaching and learning at the college gives me a ready-made understanding of the context and access to participants but what I come with can colour what I see and how I see it.

Flyvberg (ibid.) underlines this difficulty when he quotes Francis Bacon, 'When any proposition has been laid down, the human understanding forces everything else to add fresh support and confirmation' (ibid., p.398). It can be too easy to follow bias to a desired verification. It can be too easy to accept the wonderful things other voices such as Furr (2009), Gunnery (2007) and Lipman (2003) tell us about the benefits of circles because the more people say the same things, the more those ideas become established as a general 'truth'. Therefore, it is important that I am aware of this and be on the lookout for the things that are harder to see, that can be overlooked because they do not fit the generally accepted positive way of looking at circles.

Flyvberg (ibid.) provides a way to deal with bias via Charles Darwin. Darwin's solution was:

that whenever a published fact, a new observation or thought came across me, which was opposed to my general results, to make a memorandum of it without fail and at once; for I had found by experience that such facts and thoughts were far more apt to escape from the memory than favorable ones. Owing to this habit, very few objections were raised against my views, which I had not at least noticed and attempted to answer (ibid., p.398)

This is similar to the approach I used when looking at student feedback so that when I came across a view that did not seem to fit the customary circle mould I made a record of it. In this way I could capture the things opposite to confirmed established ideas, for example, highlighting participants' written evaluations with pink post-it notes to signal different opinions about circle experience (photograph 4.35).

Further, the literature review gave me opportunities to compare and contrast established views with the realities of an integrated circle in my context. This meant that the model as tested out here was not a carbon-copy of previous circles but necessarily tailored to local circumstances. The features of previous circles that were rejected for this project are detailed in key aspects of circles in Chapter 2.

This leads on to a final way in which Flyvberg (ibid.) and his work on case study is brought to bear on my data analysis process. Flyvberg (ibid.) tells us, 'The advantage of the case study is that it can 'close in' on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice' (ibid., p.398). This relates to the focus of this investigation on a local, small-scale setting and the iterative action research method attempting to make sense of the integrated circles process with those experiencing it in the real world.

Circle data comes from the real-life experience of circle participants where the reality of teaching and learning is far too complex to wrap up in a general theory. There are elements of this project that align with the theories found in the literature review, and aspects that don't fit in so neatly. An example of this is the general belief that circles are captivating (Furr, 2009) and tap into topics all students find

interesting which means all participants are 'driven to communicate' (Duncan, 2012, p.146) to express their personal interests and ask questions. However, from my observations, I have seen instances where students are not deeply engaged. Participant feedback also revealed instances of learner dissatisfaction with circles. Student engagement is a point I will return to below and in Chapter 5.

These are things to puzzle over for the integrated circle and perhaps other teaching professionals might also recognise similar aspects of the project, including the context that it takes place in. Where this is so, Flyvberg (*ibid.*) shows how the project gains warrant as it is 'accountable, in the sense of being sensible to other practitioners' (*ibid.*, p. 397).

In addition, warrant comes from careful research with the data being considered in a way that gives others confidence that the concepts and themes are truly significant because they are the types of ideas that others would recognise as relevant to the role of conversation in the ESOL classroom.

Warrant is further enhanced by avoiding subjective bias. As noted above, I have sought to avert this with the participant voice at the heart of data analysis. I have also looked closely at relevant literature to compare my pre-existing view and knowledge of circles with what leading authorities have to say. As I now invite others to look in on what I have done, I have looked at what those before me, such as Furr (*ibid.*), Gunnery (*ibid.*) and Lipman (*ibid.*) have found, in an echo of Peshkin (1985, cited in Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

Considering what others before me have to say about circle methods shows me that I am not alone; this is not merely a personal hunch because I am not the only one that thinks there is something to be said for the process. Previous works have not only guided the shaping of the practical classroom process, but indicated new and fruitful themes to follow to better understand the theory of circles.

My starting point for this investigation was with circles as a classroom activity, but I have come to gain a deeper philosophical perspective through engaging with the work of Biesta (2006, 2014) and his analysis of Arendt. I now understand the integrated circle as a time of beginnings: for student-participants learning new

language skills through a new classroom process that aids the sharing of experience to learn new things about others, for all budding classroom relationships between student(s)-teacher, student(s)-student(s) and teacher-student(s), and also myself as a newly developing teacher-researcher.

I want to make an explicit analogy between being the teacher in the classroom and me as the researcher looking at data. As a teacher I am faced with the difficulties of being in a space with students (who could be described as 'others') on a daily basis, and they with me (who could be described as an 'other'). We have to continually work out how to communicate with each other, and experience the challenge of struggling to understand one another. The classroom can be an uncertain place and it is for everyone there to be flexible in response to others. Each encounter is a new beginning.

As the project researcher, I am faced with the difficulties of making sense of the data. Where Arendt (1977, cited in Biesta, 2014, pp.104-108) talks about 'beginnings', Flyvberg (2004) recalls moments that 'shine out'. These are the things that open up interesting thoughts and require me to be flexible in my thinking as I grapple with new concepts with which I am uncertain. My researcher's attempt to analyse data is like my teacher's attempt to look for new beginnings in the classroom in order to help students develop language in new and stronger ways. The dilemma is not to take this language learning down the purely technical path. Just looking for language skills development against assessment criteria, for example, cannot explain the experience of circle learning. Likewise, as a researcher, I am required to be more open-minded, adaptable and flexible than the psychological approach would have me analyse data, because this project is about experience.

A step I have taken to help deal with the uncertainty of qualitative data analysis is to follow a systematic process of data analysis. This is not only another way to help counter subjective bias, it also gives an accepted justification over intuition and is a useful way to follow beginning thoughts to their own conclusions, rather than to the ones made by previous thinkers. A systematic approach enables me to look at data in bold ways without being reckless with it. I may not be able to communicate a simple explanation for the role of conversation in circles, but

neither should I rush to my own bias. Given that the existential situation is not black and white, taking an orderly staged approach means that data can be analysed carefully.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the action-reflection cycle (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011) provided an iterative process with which to interpret the range of information collected from the integrated circle project. My starting point came from Denscombe (2017, p.317) to compare my data and 'emerging analysis against competing theories and alternative explanations'.

Initially, the literature review gave an insight into different explanations of underpinning theories related to ESOL education where TLA is restricted by a narrow curriculum focused on language accuracy in compliance with government policies, compared to a more open, reciprocal and dialogic experience for fluency work where learners can express their own interests. This signalled the limitations and highlighted the opportunities for learner autonomy in the ESOL classroom.

Looking carefully at the relevant literature and comparing different views of what learner autonomy can be, and how different types of circles can work, provided the initial direction for approaching data without it controlling the formation of any generalised conclusions drawn from the raw data. This is the shaping work that the review of literature does in identifying important features that other researchers have found to be significant in their investigations into similar or related educational areas. It provides an initial frame to gather up the different threads running through the different circle processes, to help make sense of their meaning for this project and to formulate key concepts to better analyse the data. The advantage of concepts from other past research is that they help to see things that the untutored eye might overlook.

As I endeavour to better understand which circle features support the emergence of learner autonomy and the role conversation plays in this, I am making my own in-roads into this area of research. As a beginner, I can draw on more practised thinkers to help me look in particular directions. For example, reading Biesta's 2014 account of Arendt on beginnings has given me a new way to see what happens when the unexpected thing is said. The risk is that the ideas from other

research totally determine the data analysis whereas they can only provide a starting point, otherwise for this project the real experience of the integrated circle being investigated may be missed.

The challenge is to balance the ideas drawn deductively from the literature to help analyse the data, with the need for a fresh eye. It is not just looking at literature to help me see the things that other people have identified as perennial in circles which I had previously been unable to see, or unable to articulate. It is to develop an understanding of circles with a new perspective: to look at the data, inductively, in a way that makes space to let it speak for itself and to say things not previously mentioned in the literature but which are nonetheless important for this current research.

Inductive and deductive iterative process

Getting the balance between the inductive and deductive right holds out the potential to connect the literature to this research and this research to the literature. To locate the new things I have to say in the already ongoing academic debate about conversation in the classroom.

Earlier in the thesis, Ghaye (2011), O'Leary (2004) and Schön (1991) spoke of the reflective nature of action research. My reflections were with my own thoughts and experience, ESOL students, associated literature, research peers and supervisors, critical friends and college staff. This provided a 'dialogical other' (Pendlebury, 1995 cited in Ghaye 2011, p.44) through which to identify issues, think of possible actions, reflect on outcomes, plan my next steps and reflect on what I was discovering about the method. My reflective interactions were my conversation, discussion and dialogue in an iterative research process.

Carr (2006) discusses how action research is based on practitioners looking at practice from within its own historical context and being coloured by the world in which they operate. Reflecting on how and why things are done and testing out alternative ways opens up a professional discussion on the contemporary view of a particular situation and can move current understandings on. It is a fluid, iterative process of reflection and new action and validates a teacher-researcher's

experience and interpretations of practice as a source of knowledge real to the situation under investigation.

The iterative process of my data analysis in my action research project began in 17/18 when I investigated integrated circles from directions indicated by my previous circle projects combined with literature by previous practitioners (Furr, 2009; Gunnery, 2007; Lipman, 2003). I brought my own history and historical understandings and other historical messages to ESOL and circles to test out the integrated method in an effort to better support my learners. Carr (2006, p.426) recognises this as *phronesis*, which is:

acquired by practitioners who, in seeking to achieve the standards of excellence inherent in their practice, develop the capacity to make wise and prudent judgments about what, in a particular situation, would constitute an appropriate expression of the good.

The use of judgement is powerful for this investigation which, as it unfolds, sees particular aspects take on importance. How these aspects come to be significant recalls Flyvberg's (2004) moments that 'shine out' and can claim 'the appeal to judgment which is the appraisal of credibility in light of the reader's experience' (Stenhouse in Rudduck and Hopkins, 1985, p.31). Deciding what mattered in the data could not be purely abstract given that it was drawn from the specific circles for this project from my position as an insider in dialogue with others and their perspectives.

Each circle document and interaction became a potential focus of reflection with judgement made possible and credible from my 'historical consciousness' (Carr, p.430) as teacher and researcher aware of the policy limitations imposed on the ESOL classroom but seeking ways to expand beyond them; aware of the benefits of circles but also the difficulties; aware of my position of power in the classroom but aiming to maximise learner voice.

Using reflection for a series of judgments in iterative stages is explained as 'engaging in an open conversation in which participants strive to come to a true understanding of their historical situation' (ibid, p.430). My 'open conversation'

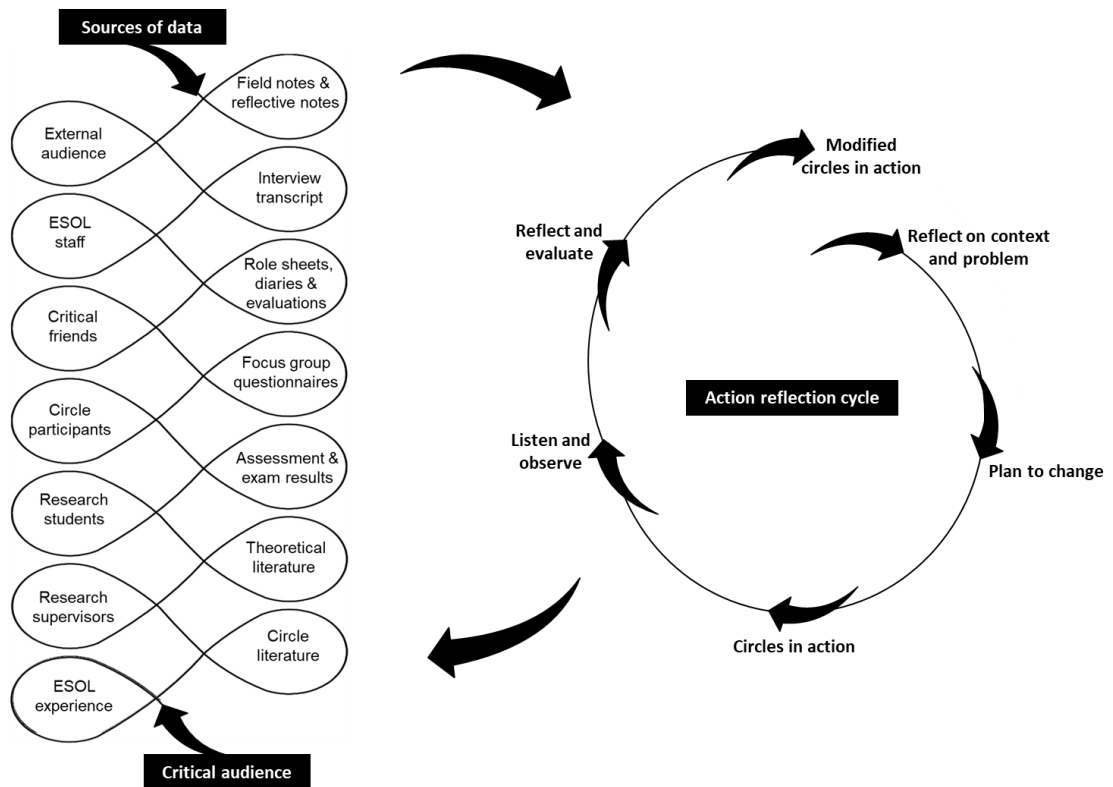
began by drawing on my previous practical knowledge of ESOL, circles and my working environment and bringing it to the current investigation. It let me talk to my old teacher-researcher self, and with previous thinkers, from my position in the present and to consider what could be done differently in the future in this particular context. This was a 'non-technical mode of situated and contextual practical reasoning' in a 'non-methodological, dialogical model of the social sciences' (ibid., p.431).

The dialogue developed in 18/19 when the pressures in my workplace and participant feedback and evaluations shed more light on the ESOL classroom and circle experiences. I was attempting to bridge ideas from literature, my evolving understandings and the realities for the participants.

Circle analysis meant moving with the data as it was collected over time. To be led to a possible hypothesis through the words and actions of the participants in conjunction with existing literature, critical comments and my developing comprehension. Carr writes how this is achieved:

by individuals displaying a willingness to put their own assumptions and beliefs at risk by participating in a genuine dialogue in which they allow the partiality and particularity of their own perspectives and understandings to be exposed to, and amended on the basis of, the perspectives and understandings of others (ibid, p.430).

My own initial 'partiality and particularity' were 'amended' by listening to, witnessing, reflecting on and speaking with learners engaged in circles. This was a living process throughout the duration of the circle plans (diagrams 4.3 and 4.8). It was an organic moving backwards and forwards between the circles in action, sources of data and a critical audience in a 'transaction with the situation' (Schön, 1991, p.164):



4.15 Action-Reflection transaction

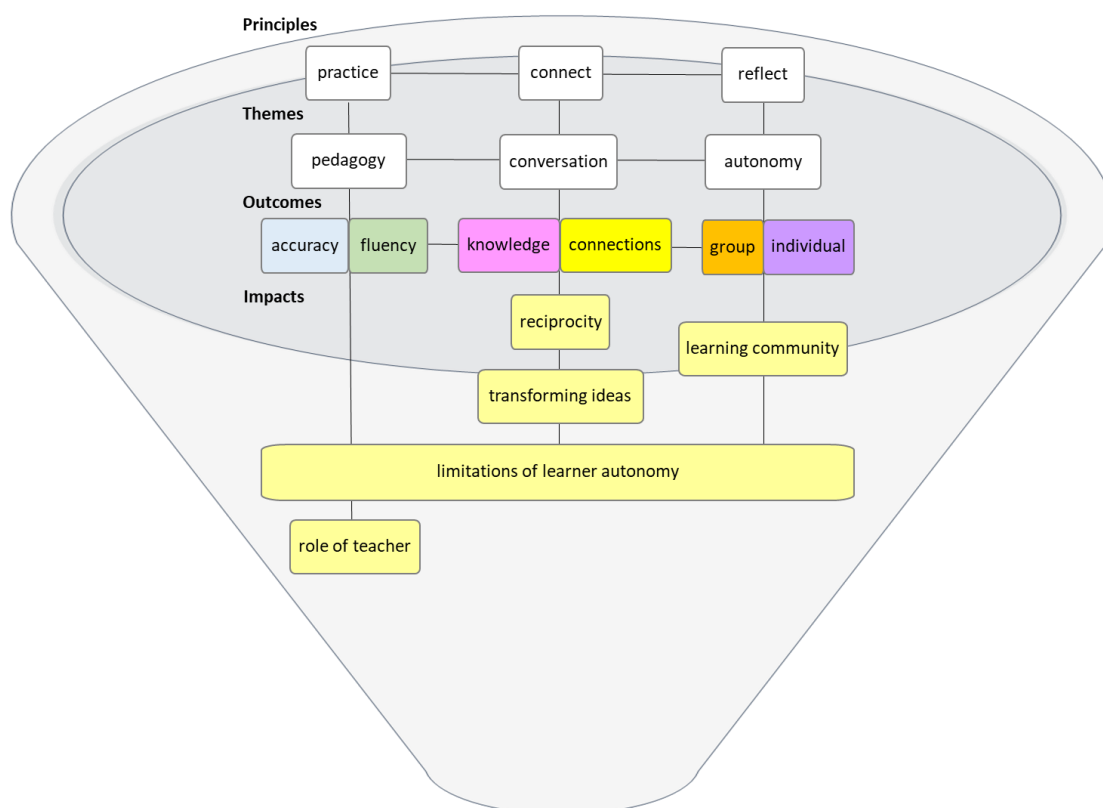
The benefit was to work towards overcoming my limited experience and knowledge of circles as an integrated method. This led to the development of the theoretical overview of integrated circles (diagram 4.36) which did not exist at the outset of this investigation. My dialogue enabled me to uncover a bigger picture of integrated circles through a ‘fusion of horizons’ (Gadamer, 1975, cited in Scott and Usher, 1996, p.19). This brought order to the principles, themes, outcomes, impacts and eventual recommendations coming from the many sources as they were ‘retained within a more integrated and more comprehensive understanding of the situation under discussion’ (Carr, 2006, p.430).

To organise data analysis, I initially used descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013, pp.87-91) to explore the data I was collecting for ‘the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience’ (ibid., p.10). This helped to name principles and themes in circles in 17/18.

Being part of the data as the teacher and sifting through it as the researcher meant ongoing reflections on the broad principles and themes to work down into the heart of circles. For each literature review, each circle and its documents I used colour codes to visually mark key aspects in real time: to add, remove or adjust as

themes emerged, merged or disappeared from the messages coming out of circles and the literature.

The colour-coding worked as my subcoding (ibid., pp.77-80). For this I used my experience and reflective judgments to group coloured notes. This highlighted the 'repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data' (ibid., p.5). The subcoding was ongoing so that I could notice the main outcomes by 18/19. As I kept returning to look and listen, I moved ever-deeper to identify 5 impacts by 19/20.



4.16 Funnel

Action research enabled me to investigate the theory of circle methods for ESOL and to funnel inside circles as a practice (O'Leary, 2004). My 'doing' of integrated circles was a complicated combination of simultaneous theoretical study, classroom action, reflection and modification of thoughts and actions as part of learning how to design and implement integrated circles and learning about the significance of the method. Appendix F contains samples of the circle project data.

Establishing a dialogue between what my data is saying and what the literature has said is especially meaningful for this circles research as it links my role as a circle researcher with my role as a circle teacher-participant, whilst also echoing the circles process for student-participants: engaging with literature is a way of 'relating life with text, text with life, seeing the links' (Carter, 2000, p.2). This enables a two way process between living classroom data and the theoretical ideas from the literature I have reviewed to inform and deepen the investigation.

The process of following deductive and inductive routes to establish the role of the integrated circles model in supporting conversation and learner autonomy means that I will be able to constantly relate literature to the integrated circle classroom and refer the classroom back to the literature, within the context of adult ESOL provision in a particular FE college in the UK, reflecting, checking and amending inductive–deductive themes with collected data. My next action is to provide examples of the data and emerging patterns.

Part 3: Examples of data and emerging patterns

Introduction

The third part of this chapter gives examples of the range of data which was collected and collated manually. The manual technique was a deliberate choice over using a data analysis tool such as NVivo. Taking a manual approach allowed me to keep a closer contact between the literature and my practice without an intermediary device to code and categorise ideas. Handling the physical data and the physical pages in the literature put me at heart of the process. I realised an experience-based project, such as the integrated circle, is built on ideas in a more creative way than a scientific approach to data.

The paper-based system was possible due to the small-scale nature of the action research project where the quantity of data was manageable. I created and maintained a consistent filing system across the two years so I could quickly locate different sources of data. The blue folders contain documents from year one and the green folder for year two. The specific filing sections in the data folders and the specific order of artefacts within each section, the weight and feel of the

documents and the shape of participants' handwritten text on the pages, for example, gave me a full picture of the data collected and a clear working memory of where to locate relevant examples.



4.17 Integrated circle project files

The data moves from looking at circles as an integrated model for the classroom in 17/18, to developing a wider view of circles in 18/19 as a process to generate meaningful dialogue for learning. This paves the way for examples of learner autonomy linked to the theoretical discussion of 19/20.

At this point, I will take data from the three pre-circle, in-circle and post-circle stages collected over the two active years. All identifying details such as participant names, class names and dates have been redacted to preserve anonymity. Emerging patterns are drawn out from the data and presented for the integrated circle as a classroom activity that can accommodate psychological-accuracy and existential-fluency approaches to ESOL education.

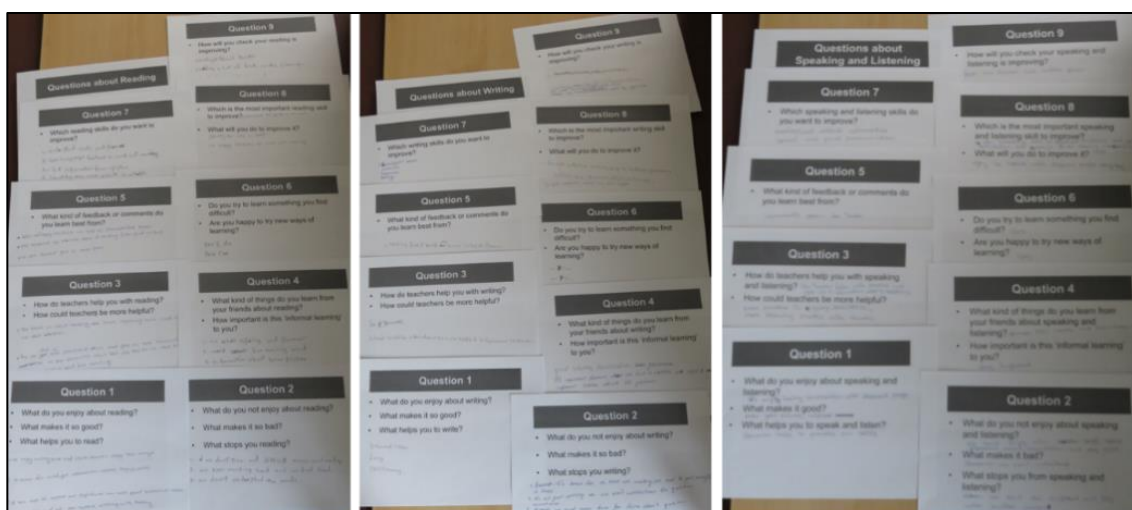
1. Pre-circle

1a. Focus group

The pre-circle focus groups in both years centred on trying to gain an insight into the participants' views of learning ESOL and the factors they saw as helpful or as barriers to progress. Nine discussion points were adapted from Coffield (2008, p.64) as a tool to stimulate thinking and conversation for each of the ESOL modes. The first group in 17/18 was invited to comment on all the questions for reading, writing, and speaking and listening. One question was issued to each pair of students who wrote comments on the question sheet. The next question was

issued as their ideas dried up. This continued until all questions had been issued for comment. However, this was repetitive and onerous for participants who had to quickly switch their minds between their reading, writing, and speaking and listening experiences.

For all other focus meetings, the participants were invited to freely join one of three small groups – one for reading, one for writing, and one for speaking and listening – where they felt they had the most things to contribute. One question was issued to each group to discuss and write comments on the question sheet and, as their talk came to an end, the next question was issued. This continued until all of the groups had had the chance to think about all of the questions for their chosen mode:



4.18 Example focus group feedback

As a follow-up activity, the questions for the three separate modes were gathered up into questions about learning English. The questions were issued on A4 paper as a take home activity. This was a way for students to record individual ideas that came to them following the focus group session about any of the ESOL modes. The completed sheets were returned at the beginning of the following week's class:

Questions about Learning English

1. What do you enjoy about learning English?
What makes it good? What helps you to learn?

Reading Writing **Speaking and Listening**

This is because you get to learn more. Also you get to hear other people's opinions.

2. What do you not enjoy about learning English?
What makes it bad? What stops you learning?

Reading **Writing** Speaking and Listening

This is because very difficult for me to spell correctly.

3. How do teachers help you with learning English?
How could teachers be more helpful?

The teachers help us by listening to our questions and answering for us by helping us with our spelling.

4. What kind of things do you learn from your friends about learning English?
How important is this 'informal learning' to you?

That it's very important to learn English so you can get your exams correct.

5. What kind of feedback or comments do you learn best from? Tick (✓)

The teacher / my friend tells me what I good at and what I need to practice.

The teacher / my friend corrects my mistakes.

The teacher / my friend writes messages on my work.

Other...

6. Do you try to learn something you find difficult?
Are you happy to try new ways of learning?

I would like to find a different way of learning English.

7. What could you do to improve your English generally?

I would practice English everyday.

8. Which is the most important English skill to improve? (Check your Assesst list)
What will you do to improve it?

Reading because you get to learn more information.

9. How will you check your English skills are improving?

By doing a test to see how good I am and challenge myself.

4.19 Example individual feedback

Feedback provided five key areas as potential barriers to learning English. It also indicated the type of support learners believed would help them overcome them. I hoped the integrated circle might respond in the classroom as follows:

Barriers	Support	Circle response
Lack of time	More time	Weekly time
Demanding level of work	Appropriate level	Graded texts and tasks
Limited range of topics	More interesting topics	Variety of topics
Unknown assessment criteria	Knowing the assessment criteria	Shared assessment criteria
Solitary work	Learning with others	Collaboration via roles

4.20 Feedback and circle response

Support requested to counteract barriers indicated a need for autonomy support which implied a role for the teacher to supply controlled practice via relevant texts and tasks, to share the assessment criteria and provide feedback against it. Student autonomy featured in the fifth support need as circle discussions offer space for group-directed learning conversations.

1b. Self-assessments:

Participants self-evaluated their ability against the ESB or Ascentis assessment criteria for reading, writing, speaking and listening in 17/18 and 18/19 respectively. For each skill, the participants rated personal ability on a scale of 1 to 5:

5 = I can do this unaided.

4 = I can do this alone but I need to use a resource.

3 = I can do this with help from a friend.

2 = I can only do this with help from my tutor.

1 = I can't do this at all.

The participants completed this exercise before the circle cycle began and once it had finished. The results were combined to show a general learner view of the impact of the circle experience in a quantitative way with small increases in self-confidence across the ESOL modes:

	Reading		Writing		Listening		Speaking	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
17/18	3.52	4.03	3.60	4.00	3.58	4.03	3.36	3.89
18/19	3.52	3.96	3.24	3.79	3.10	3.97	3.03	3.79

4.21 Self-assessments

This exercise relates to the psychological aspect of circles that develops language as a skill that can be assessed in controlled tasks. It implies a role for the teacher in presenting language and providing time to practice in a controlled way before learners produce the language following the rules presented by the teacher. The teacher must then give feedback on how accurately the learner produces the target language. This aspect is seen in circle 'mini-lessons' that make explicit the language points presented in the stimulus texts. For the participants it meant:

'Skills practiced are very good because the teacher's teaching is very good. They explain to me when I don't understand something.' [Rose]

Being asked to think about ability at the end of the project timeframe, gave participants a chance to think about their starting points and become aware of personal limitations as well as achievements, that making progress as a language learner takes time and practising skills are necessary to pass the exams. Categorising ability on a sliding scale suits quantitative and psychological methods

which fit well with institutional requirements to monitor progress with mock exams marked in line with the awarding body's assessment criteria, to make predictions and to decide final exam entries.

However, this type of data is only captured on a specific day and time in the SfL scheme of work. Students who are absent from class on the days of assessments are missing from data resulting in only a partial view. The results do not account for 100% return. For example of the 34 participants in 17/18, 31 completed a reading self-assessment both pre- and post-circle, 29 for writing and 30 for speaking and listening. In 18/19, 15 out of the 28 participants completed both pre- and post-circle self-assessments for all modes. This issue carries forward to mock results.

1c. Mock results 1

Figures obtained from mock results relate to those present on the day of assessment and working towards E3 exams. The data does not include information from circle participants with spikey profiles entered for E2 or L1 exam modes.

The results available for 17/18 relate to 21 participants for the E3 reading mocks, 19 for writing and 30 for speaking and listening. The results for 18/19 are for 23 E3 reading mocks, 21 writing and 16 speaking and listening.

Reading

Reflecting on the 17/18 integrated circle iteration, it was clear that more class time had been spent reading against the assessment criteria and perhaps this had had an impact on improved results. Another reason may have been incorporating a varied range of texts with unsettled topics (Lipman, 2003) for the participants to think and talk about leading them to read more carefully to discuss for deeper understandings. As Regina commented: 'It allows me [to] reason and bring out skills to evaluate my experience and my knowledge' [Regina].

An adjustment made for the 18/19 iteration was to devote more time to writing to help even the text-task ratio. The result was to see a small rise in the average

reading mock exam pass rate, which may point to the positive impact of reading-writing connections (Gunnery, 2007).

Reading		
Year	Initial	Formative
17/18	87%	92%
18/19	69%	80%

4.22 Reading mock results

Writing

The circle imagined in Chapter 2 was adapted against the constraints posed by the college timetable. Writing tasks could not become the focus of a dedicated writing feedback class without losing space for some of the required course content.

Writing tasks were introduced after the mini-lesson section of a class and completed independently as homework. Marked and corrected work with written feedback was returned to the students in their next class with verbal comments to explain the written feedback. In reality this meant that any individuals choosing to act on feedback did so in their own time without further class support.

In addition, the ESB/Ascentis writing tasks included text types that participants had little or no experience of composing such as magazine articles and comparative reports. It is a longer-term challenge to become familiar with new tasks and the language skills required. Writing, as a productive skill, can be demanding. Different students develop their skills at different rates, giving rise to the ESOL spikey profile. Rehma explained:

‘Writing is difficult. Some people understand very quick, very fast, but like me it’s not easy to understand very quick. For me it’s hard.’ [Rehma]

On occasions the task rubric itself was a complication to overcome. A task in the 17/18 mock one paper (ESB, 2015) asked the students to write a report comparing four factors in two countries in about 100 words. They had approximately 25 minutes to complete this task. Student feedback was the time needed to think of the appropriate key vocabulary, write a plan and construct the report with accurate

content, layout, sequence, grammar, punctuation and spelling was challenging due to the number of factors required within the timescale.

Task 2

Write a report for your college magazine comparing two countries you know. Write about the two different public transport systems, types of housing, shopping facilities and weather.

First, **write a plan**, such as a spidergram, mind map, bullet points or notes.

4.23 Example ESB rubric

The requirement to show 100% of the assessment criteria is also challenging because, as Irma said, 'to pass all writing skills is difficult – just one wrong, no pass.' [Irma]

An adjustment in the second iteration to spend more mini-lesson time on writing with exemplars and linked tasks only gave a 2% increase in the average mock exam pass rate.

Writing		
Year	Initial	Formative
17/18	81%	74%
18/19	73%	75%

4.24 Writing mock results

The writing mock results indicate that students generally find it challenging to produce a growing range of grammar structures accurately in a wider range of unfamiliar text types as they progress through their ESOL level. Accurate achievement of 100% of assessed writing skills requires time and focused attention on accuracy.

Speaking and Listening

Testing out an integrated circle method that uses learner conversation to support reading and writing, had no positive effect on speaking and listening mock results as assessed by the QCF framework. This may be to do with the difficulties producing accurate language instantaneously under the pressure of exam conditions. It may also be because teacher and peer feedback was generally

related to the circle process or ideas that surfaced from roles and discussion rather than on accuracy in spoken words. Any feedback provided on speaking and listening as an assessed skill was given on unrecorded work. As soon as student uttered their words, they were lost on the air. The speaker had nothing tangible to attach feedback comments to or to spot their own errors and self-correct. The integrated circle failed to support the psychological aspects of conversation for exam results during this project.

Speaking & Listening		
Year	Initial	Formative
17/18	14%	10%
18/19	22%	22%

4.25 Speaking and Listening mock results

However, talking together was an aspect of circles that participants found helpful. The discussions students had in their circles covered technical aspects of language learning and this is related to the concept of accuracy. The conversations also covered ground related to fluency as they included an exchange of knowledge and personal anecdotes about different expectations in different countries about the same topics. Students could question and reflect upon what they heard, amend preconceived ideas or fill in gaps in what they previously knew about language and the wider world. These discussions were student-led and revealed a space for learner autonomy to pursue conversational paths.

Under the umbrella of learner autonomy, the first major area of impact arising from the data is reciprocity in language learning through conversation. A second aspect of transforming ideas by sharing experience is also brought to light in the data. Emerging impacts are discussed later in this chapter.

2. In-circle

2a. Roles

Taking circle methods as a classroom technique in the first instance meant looking at circle roles and what they could tell us about the method. It seemed that the roles worked as a scaffold for each learner, giving a focus for thinking about a

stimulus text and to formulate their own comments or questions for the group discussion.

The roles reduced the demand of reading to comprehend a text as a whole. The roles focused on specific word, sentence or text levels with an added cultural dimension. The weekly discussion task helped to put the separate literacy pieces back together in order to comprehend the text as a whole alongside learning about other experiences from a multicultural perspective.

Word	Sentence	Text	Culture
Word Master	Passage Person	Discussion Leader Summariser Feature Marker	Connector

4.26 Role perspectives

The roles worked in two ways: the Feature Marker and Summariser are aligned with matters of accuracy; the Discussion Leader and Connector delve into deeper meanings and personal connections; and the Passage Person and Word Master offer a bridge between the ways of engaging with language learning, as anticipated in Chapter 3, diagram 3.3.

Extracts and commentary from role sheets completed for the video circle discussion are used here to represent circle roles generally. The circle stimulus was *'Time to Travel'* adapted from Lee (2019). The data endorses the combination of language accuracy and fluency work in circle roles and conversation:

Discussion Leader

Is fritz is a good husband,
yes he is a very good husband.
nice person, little dull but he was intelligent and
hard worker.

Fluency

4.27 Discussion Leader extract

At one level, an accurate reading of a text means finding literal information. However, the Discussion Leader role opens up conversations about themes in a text to include sharing personal experience. For this text, the theme is marriage and relationships. In the circle, the participants shared their views on the role of women, being married, getting divorced and its impact on children. This was an

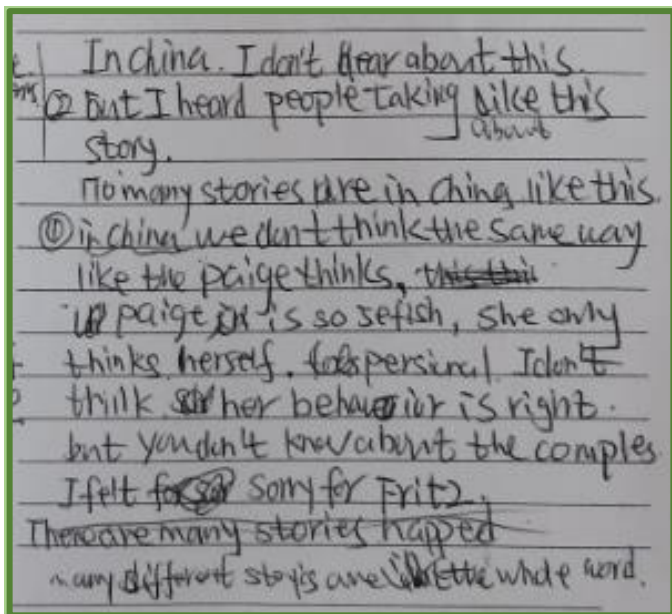
empowering moment for the participants in fluent conversation: “I am [an] independent free woman” [Poppy].

It also showed the participants accommodating different views:

Poppy:	I after divorce and I feel so alright and good.
Flower:	If I get divorce I will die one day, believe me.
Poppy:	If you happy, but you have to have to know many many women is unhappy.
Flower:	I agree with you not all, not all women is happy. For family, for children, sometimes this is only one way – divorce.

Circle discussion opens a ‘space of appearance’ (Arendt, 1977, quoted in Biesta, 2014) for diversity. There is a freedom for unfettered conversations where talking can represent plurality.

Connector



Fluency

4.28 Connector extract

These notes from Daisy as the Connector link her cultural experience to the themes in the text. In the circle conversation, Daisy said she had “heard stories by people talking on the radio” like the text character, Paige, about divorce but it is very different to her country as in “China really we don't think that way”.

The role illustrates diversity. For this conversation, it was about how private and public views of relationships can be different as Daisy said about the main

character, Fritz, “you know in the world many things happen different. He’s a good man but you don’t know about couples’ things.” [Daisy]

By sharing her cultural experience, the other participants gained an insight into other thoughts about the world around them. Talking together was a beginning for new thoughts.

Passage Person		Fluency
<p>My paragraphs: Page <u>1</u> Paragraph <u>2</u> Reasons for choosing the paragraph Questions about the paragraph</p> <p><u>The reasons I chose this paragraph</u> <u>When was Fritz thinking about</u> <u>like when I did some thing</u> <u>his father?</u></p>		
<p><u>write in a logical order</u> <u>e.g and, but, so^{and} because</u></p>		Accuracy

4.29 Passage Person extract

The Passage Person reflects the concept of fluency as they read for inference or interpretation and relate to personal experience. Paragraph two of the circle text was a text-life link for Farima:

“Sometime when we are upset, we all thinking about our family so I hope my family is there with me. Especially when we have some, you know, some like party or er, some, er some occasion, yeah. We can feel our whole family. I hope my father is there. This one is a little bit for me interesting.” [Farima]

Passages in a text that chime with the reader provoke an emotional response. The sharing of these responses is a way in to the life of another to gain an understanding of individuals.

The role also incorporates accuracy as it includes text cohesion. As Farima talked about the paragraphs in the text, she highlighted the sequencing of the story:

“My next paragraph is page one, paragraph four. It's also about Fritz. When did Fritz, er, go for last time, er, to university? And, er, second question is: What did people, er, say about Fritz?” [Farima]

For this role, Farima used sequencing words to order her own speaking. She practises accuracy by speaking in a logical order with words such next, also, last, second.

Word Master			Fluency
Page: 1 Para: 3 Line: 4 Success	Somebody or something that does well, or that people like a lot	Important in my life to be success, you change life.	
Word / Phrase	Meaning	Why I chose it	Accuracy
Page: 1 Para: 1 Line: 7 briefcases	Use for carrying papers, especially when you go to work	better to for keep my things like papers. Sertificat =	

4.30 Word Master extract

Reading a text as Word Master exposes the participant to vocabulary that can develop into a personal wordbank for independent use. Having words to use freely for personal reasons and expression is part of fluency. Flower chose the word ‘success’ as it is personally significant for her as a student and someone building a new life in the UK:

“I choose success, paragraph 3, line 4 – er, this word means some somebody or something that does well or that people like a lot. Er, the success means, er, if you you pass the exam this is success. Why I chose this word because important in my life to be, er, to be succeed. I feel you, you change life if I do success.” [Flower]

The Word Master role also works at text level to understand the literal meaning of vocabulary. The character Fritz had carried a heavy briefcase to university and is about to start work but the reader is not told what a briefcase is or why he has one:

“I choose the word ‘briefcase’. The meaning of this word [is] used for carrying papers. Ah, especially when you go to work. You go to work and you keep the papers well. Keep them safe in the briefcase.” [Flower]

This aspect of the Word Master requires participants to use dictionaries to find and explain definitions and to state why the words are important to help understand the text. This is about basic comprehension, being correct and accurate.

Summariser

My Summary
 Fritz and Paige had got married when they were 18. Tomorrow will Fritz ~~the end of~~ ^{finish} university and he's prepared a surprise holiday for Paige. They were going to spend a couple months visiting in America. left Paige prepared a surprise for Fritz^{too} but very different. She ~~three~~ letters for Fritz about a divorce proceeding, because she doesn't want to be a housewife all the time, she wants to travel the world.

Accuracy

4.31 Summariser extract

The Summariser seeks to understand main details. The function of the Summariser is to identify the main characters and events. Poppy provided a simple precis of the text which she read aloud to the group.

The Summariser role is for accurate comprehension. Participants judge whether the Summariser has identified the relevant points:

Rose:	OK. Yeah, yeah. OK, Finished?
Daisy:	She's finished.
Rose:	OK. Thank you, Poppy.

When the group agrees appropriate details have been summarized, they indicate that the role has been completed successfully to the required standard.

Feature Marker

Features / Marks	Use	Why I chose it
Page:	Fritz	First letter, capital
Para: Line:	America	are capital, because
In the whole text	Paige	
	Bob	The names are proper name.

Accuracy

4.32 Feature Marker extract

The Feature Marker looks for language features and punctuation marks that are synonymous with the type of text being read. Lily honed in on how narratives typically include proper nouns:

“In the whole text: Fritz, America, Paige. I choose it because first the character are capital because the names are proper names, you know. So first character are capital. All of them.” [Lily]

The Feature Marker role supports accurate writing by drawing attention to the punctuation and layout required to achieve assessed tasks.

Although this role is ostensibly to do with accuracy, in a twist, Lily shows how roles can be interpreted autonomously by the participant. She identifies speech marks partly to explain their punctuation function to show speech, ‘she said’ [Lily], but also the emotional meaning of the words contained within them, ‘someone’s feeling, she said “I’m so sorry”’ [Lily].

2b. Circle texts and tasks

The first task for all participants was to read a text as a stimulus for completing their roles. The initial idea was to draw on a range of graded texts in order to respond to learner feedback, in point 1a above, that ESOL experience is impeded by texts with language beyond current level of comprehension and with limited topics. Graded SfL texts are useful for language level and accuracy as they are aligned with the AECC (DfES, 2001). However, they limit ESOL to contexts ‘in familiar formal exchanges connected with education, training, work and social roles’ (ibid, p.177). Therefore, for fluency, I gathered texts from a wider range of sources that support graded reading such as language course books, adapted and authentic materials. The choice of texts was amended in the second active year, 18/19, in response to learner feedback and assessment results for more listening practice. The texts used are shown in the circle plans above.

Completing roles revealed a limitation of the circle process – not all participants complete the at-home reading and note-making. I had struggled with how to react to this in Chapter 2, Submitting work. I made the decision to respect the participants as adults responsible for managing their own time and commitments

outside the class alongside college work. I included a 20-30 minute slot at the beginning of each circle for participants to talk with a partner who had the same role. This gave time for the participants to clarify their roles and notes together autonomously, and I was available for teacher support if needed. If a participant had not completed their at-home tasks, they had an opportunity to make a few notes at this point to take to their discussion group. This worked well for the participant who came to class unprepared but could be frustrating to those that were ready to start the discussion. It is a sticking point I have yet to resolve and participants also recognise the trouble this poses:

Mathieu:	Sometimes people don't make tasks - just waiting on group to write [copy] our part. I think the teacher should be like the police and make sure of all homework and work.
Me:	What about for this adult class? Are students responsible for their own work?
Mathieu:	Well, yes I know, but still they don't do it. It's their choice.

Non-completion of roles could be related to the difficulty some participants had in coming to terms with autonomy, which is a significant break from traditional classroom arrangements where the teacher is seen to have all the power and answers. Other contributing factors may have been beginning to understand circles as a new learning process and beginning to accept peers as a source of teaching and learning support:

Mr Green:	I think it's better to talk with you [the teacher] in one group because no-one knows what to do.
Jack:	We can decide to go one by one, round the table. I think that will make it easy.

After the circle discussion, I presented follow-up activities to support writing tasks linked to the reading texts. Writing tasks aim to extend the pre-circle independent reading-thinking and the group discussion by transferring what is learned to writing. The transferrable reading-writing elements can be based on accurate spelling, punctuation, grammar and layout or topic ideas and ways of self-expression exchanged through discussion.

A key issue raised by writing tasks relates to the QCF marking policy. ESB/Ascentis exam candidates must achieve 100% of the assessment criteria to

pass. Augustin acknowledges this challenge: “In the exam you can be wrong – wrong with ESB. It was better with Cambridge you could pass.” [Augustin].

Augustin, in a repeat of Irma’s comments about writing mock results, raises implications for learning timescales and activities to develop the technical ability required to evidence competence.

Text choice, task completion and task success indicate two areas of impact. Firstly, the teacher’s role is influenced by accuracy to provide autonomy support for language skills and by fluency with the shift towards student autonomy. Secondly, the shifting way of working together in the circle classroom highlights limitations of autonomy as participants come to grips with a new more open process to learn language skills.

2c. Circle discussion

From observing, taking notes, listening to feedback and reading participant reflections of weekly circle discussions it became possible to identify how learner conversations were not just about language learning, but also as a way by which they could develop their learning society within the class. Firstly, I began to see opportunities in the integrated circle where the participants were learning to learn together. This was where they were acting independently of the teacher to help each other understand language points. It also included opportunities to share different life experiences to develop new views of the world.

In a circle discussion extract about a food article, ‘*Fields of Gold*’ (Tesco, 2013), Regina uses the photographs to establish typical magazine layout and the main topic – both assessed writing skills. The conversation opens to freely share different ways of cooking sweetcorn. The conversation then turns to political situations and its impact on farming in different parts of the world:

Regina:	It’s an article. [<i>Points to and taps the images and their position on the page</i>]. You can buy this from a market. It’s still fresh.
Rehma:	When I buy it, I buy it to put it in water but no salt. It’s sweet.
Regina:	I think you put salt in the water.
Rehma:	It’s your choice. You can decide.
Regina:	It’s your choice.

Rehma:	In my country you can buy it in a vacuum [pack] and it has salt already. Here it's sweeter so for me I don't put salt.
Biftu:	Here it is peaceful, democracy, but in Africa [<i>shrugs</i>]. No, here it's peaceful, democracy. Here there are machines. In my country we use two cows in the field.
Qali:	There aren't cows in my country – just people in the fields.
Halima:	It's good to have a tractor but you need money. It's not safe to go out in my country. At night, you can't go to the shop because it's too dangerous.

The extract is an example of how circle discussions work at the group and individual levels to support collective learning and self-development. Learning conversations draw on dialogic repertoires (Alexander, 2017) in student-led, collaborative, collective interactions for autonomous discussions. Further, discussions involve self-interaction or individual thinking, linking to cognitive autonomy (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004).

In addition, being in a circle environment means participants learn to be together by managing their own discussions. This implies dialogic exchanges (Sennett 2018) limited by conditions of diversity (Burbules, 2007) to gradually form comfortable relationships.

“Being a new experience. It's normal to be nervous. Like going to your first exam and feeling nervous, yes? That's the meaning of nervous. You are human, yeah? Over time, you start to have more experience and learn how to approach everybody.” [Tinca]

Sharing personal experiences opens you up to others. Participants can come to know a little bit about one another which helps to build relationships. The video (4.33) captured how a trust had formed in the circle which allowed for open discussions where different personalities could mix in a relaxed and engaged way. Relationships belong with the theme of building the learning community.



4.33 An integrated circle in action

2d. Participant reflection diaries

Two examples are given here as indicative of participants' self-reflective diaries from Star, 17/18 and Poppy, 18/19. The comments highlight how the integrated circle operates for accuracy and fluency.

Circles Diary

Name: [Redacted] Group: [Redacted] Date: [Redacted]

Text: The Perfect Body

My Circle Role (✓ one box):
 Discussion Leader Passage Person Word Master
 Summariser Connector Feature Marker

Feelings
 ● What did I enjoy? ● What made me happiest? ● What did I dislike?
 Today I enjoy everything in my class. It's making feeling happy when we talk together.

Thinking
 ● What made me really think? ● What new things did I learn?
 ● Which ESB skills were easy for me to use? ● Which ESB skills do I need to practice more?
 Reading: Use language features. I need to practice more at Writing.
 Speaking and listening: Give information. Write with correct grammar.

Progress
 ● What helped this week when I had a problem? ● How do I know my English is improving?
 ● What will I do next to keep improving?
 I will read ~~to~~ more to improve my language. I now that because now I feel more confident when I talk or read or speaking.

Other English texts
 ● What other English texts did I read, write, speak or listen to this week?
 ● What did I learn from the other texts?
 I read my kids books every evening at home.
 I learning mor words and bee more confident.

Star Poppy, Starkey - ESR 18/19 Progress in Educational Research 2017, 14

17/18

My Progress and Review

SEPPA stage 4

Date	Progress and review (tutor and student comments)	Future work / new targets
[Redacted]	Text: Career Paths - Article Role: Passage Person	A New home
	Thoughts: The new things I have learned today are interesting I feel OK.	
[Redacted]	Text: A New Home - Account & Formal letter Role: Connector	Audio 1
	Thoughts: I know my English is improving because I got more information about English language that I will do next to improve more, work more, more practice.	
[Redacted]	Text: Audio 1 - Complaint dialogue & Formal letter Role: Word Master	The Hotel's Greatest Traveller's
	Thoughts: What really made me think today was good discuss all group that really helped me today was -11-	

18/19

4.34 Integrated circle diary examples

Star shows how the circle process promotes accuracy by quoting ESB/Ascentis skills - 'Reading: Use language features. Speaking and listening: Give information' and 'Write with correct grammar' [Star]. Poppy draws on the psychological view of language learning by stating her next steps are to 'work more, more practice'

[Poppy] recalling learning by rote and repetition (Alexander, 2017). These reflections focus on accuracy so that participants can say “I have learned from my mistakes - not repeat them again” [Rehma].

Fluency is exemplified in reflections about students working and learning together in shared ways. What really made Poppy think and helped her was the ‘good discuss[ion]’ with ‘all group’ [Poppy]. This creates a comfortable learning environment. Star is ‘happy when we talk together’ and feels ‘more confident’ [Star]. Students helping other students by talking together draws attention to the potential for learner autonomy in circles and the theme of learning community.

3. Post-circle

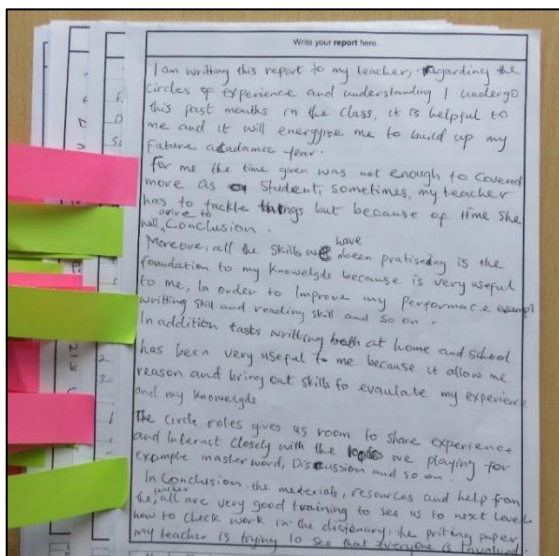
3a. Mock results 2

Changes in self-evaluation of ability and internally assessed results are recorded in point 1c above. It is understood that this circle process resulted in minimal changes against the shared assessment criteria. Greater information comes from the qualitative data in the reports participants wrote of their circle experience.

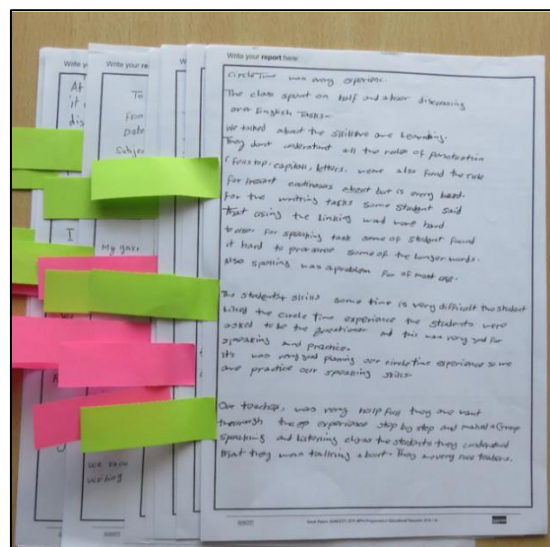
3b. Evaluation reports

The evaluation exercise asked participants to reflect on the integrated circle process and feedback on how it responded to the support needs identified in point 1a for more time, tasks at an appropriate level, more interesting topics, knowing the assessment criteria and learning with others. The report was completed as a homework task and 23 evaluations were returned from 62 circle participants.

Positive feedback was identified with green post-it notes. Negative comments were linked to pink post-it notes.



17/18



18/19

4.35 Participant evaluations

The main findings from the returned participant evaluations are recorded in diagram 4.36. The diagram shows the number of counts students made specific reference to the support needs identified in point 1a, indicating that time and learning with others were the most significant factors for the circles.

	TIME	LEVEL	TOPICS	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	LEARNING WITH OTHERS
2017/18	9	3	2	6	5
2018/19	10	2	3	3	8
TOTAL	19	5	5	9	13

4.36 Evaluation findings

The consensus was that learning ESOL requires more time than is currently provided by college. The 3-hour week provision is insufficient for accuracy: to learn the required skills to the required standard to pass exams in the academic year timescale.

The circle method does not produce extra time but it does approach time in a different way to traditional SfL classes that utilise a teacher-led presentation, production, practice model of teaching English. A circle asks students to commit more of their own time to learning outside of the classroom in a flipped approach. However, this was a challenge for the majority of learners with family and work commitments. Further, evaluations highlight how language learning takes a 'slow and long time' [Hira] as a cognitive activity.

Evaluations indicate that learning with others is the way a circle helps with learning. Learning together is a feature of accuracy where assessed skills are strengthened. Participants highlight gains in reading and writing, in particular vocabulary, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Cognitive and procedural autonomy support in circle experiences ‘taught me how to think, make notes and discuss together’ [Halima] and ‘to think in English’ [Roz].

Circle discussions included opportunities for fluent use of language and learner autonomy to ‘present our opinions with the help of roles...to participate in the discussion’ [Poppy] building ‘the courage to speak with others and self-confidence’ [Mr Green]. A new community develops with ‘personal and social skill development...to make friends, to learn together different ideas and relationships with the class’ [Biftu].

The level of circle activities generated mixed responses, which reflects the diversity of different people with different levels of language abilities. For some ‘it’s very hard when I read or write because I don’t understand the task sometimes’ [Naima] but for others ‘the students understood what they were talking about’ [Zack]. Teaching and learning with a group made up of spikey profiles is a regular feature of ESOL and poses a dilemma for the role of the teacher. For circles, one response is to bring in the psychological approach and break the circle process down into small sequential steps: ‘Our teacher was very helpful – they went through the experience step by step and made a group speaking and listening class’ [Zack].

Feedback on topics indicate how a circle can straddle the SfL agenda and a more open experience. Biftu commented that the circle experience included learning ‘about writing and reading skills for life in the UK’ [Biftu] and Malla noted ‘the skills that we practised were very useful and relatable to daily work, for example the skills were letter writing, making plans, reports and making effective paragraphs’ [Malla]. Language for daily life is an important aspect for learners and how a circle can be tailored to learner needs for communicative accuracy such as ‘language exercises on everyday life needed to communicate in different situations’ [Poppy].

However, Roz also revealed how the circle is a space to make new beginnings with 'new things like new stories, new words, new listening and speaking' [Roz].

Ten students specifically commented about circle roles. These suggest that the Discussion Leader, Word Master and Connector roles are the most significant. These roles were mentioned 7, 6 and 5 times. Summariser and Feature Marker were mentioned three times, and Passage Person was mentioned twice.

Discussion Leader underlines the collaborative nature of circles 'The discussion leaders were very useful [to] us - we could work together' [Habebee]. Word Master links to a familiar language learning task and is easily accessible as a means to develop vocabulary for greater comprehension: 'I understand more words and topics ...to help me understand better [Najibeh]. Connector encourages a sharing of difference 'to mix people in different discussion' [Biftu]. Overall, the roles signalled the participatory and supportive nature of circles as all 'have a role and people were not left out' [Malla] in which participants 'could always count on teacher and group help' [Star].

The circle participants' ideas for the future of circles call for more time for both accuracy and fluency progress. Two participants suggested issuing a set text book for self-study ahead of the class and for later self-reference, relating to the controlled accurate element of learning and a potential future development for the process.

However, these reports were written to emulate an ESB-Ascentis exam task and, up to this point, the majority of the data had come from artefacts collected by me as the teacher-researcher in the course of scheduled lessons and assessment windows. I felt strongly that a deeper participant view of the experience was lacking from the available data. To redress this imbalance, I undertook a series of semi-structured interviews with six participants. This gave a fresh perspective to the data which illustrates not only the diverse backgrounds of ESOL learners, but hones in on five areas of impact emerging from inside the circle as being central to this investigation from participants' own stories.

Voices from inside the circle

Firstly, the six participants who agreed to take part in the interviewing process, known by their chosen pseudonyms are: Baiba from Latvia; Charliy from Iran; Flower from Sudan; Irma from Morocco; Marva from Moldova; and Poppy from Poland. There are 5 women and one man, from 34 to 54 years old. Between them they speak a combination of 8 languages and 1 dialect: Arabic, Farsi, French, Gorani, Italian, Kurdish, Latvian, Polish and Russian. Four are able to communicate in multiple languages and two are monolingual.

Four participants had some experience of learning English in their home countries, but these experiences were vastly different. Poppy went to primary school and studied English language. Irma also went to primary school but was only taught the English alphabet. Flower attended English classes in a refugee camp. Marva is self-taught using YouTube videos. Baiba and Charliy did not start learning English until they arrived in England and joined the college.

All of the participants have studied ESOL at the college in the past. Five participants have experienced standard SfL classes but Flower started under JobCentre Plus Employability provision. None of the learners had experienced any type of circle learning before.

Two of the participants work: one is a part-time hotel housekeeper and one is a chef. Four are fulltime parents.

They have different reasons for learning English. Three are focused on ESOL as necessary for life and independence in the UK. Irma describes this as important “to help my children and for a good life”. Poppy says: “I want to know the letters I read, and to know how to write documents I need, not ask my children.”

Three have future plans to work. Irma would like to be a teacher’s assistant or start a business. Flower dreams of finding humanitarian aid work or of being a nurse. Charliy feels that the time has already passed to realise a true ambition, saying “I wanted to be a plumber but I am nearly 40 years old so I think hairdressing is better for me now. Plumbing is hard work”. Poppy worked in the past, but is no longer able to due to health issues.

The feedback and comments made by these 6 participants helped to firm up how five factors were emerging as important to circle pedagogy. These factors are:

1. reciprocity in language learning
2. transforming ideas by sharing experience
3. building the learning community
4. limitations of learner autonomy in circles
5. the role of the teacher

The first factor shows how learners help each other to learn English:

“I feel very comfortable being part of the circle group. It is an international class and we can only speak in English together. It helps me practise English. If you discuss with the group, it’s like an exercise for your English.”
[Poppy]

Learning English as “an exercise” points to the psychological approach to teaching and learning where ‘practise makes perfect’. This is related to the idea of accuracy that features in SfL ESOL education where the curriculum is designed to instil specific ways of using language.

The second factor is evident where discussions enabled participants to think again about the world around them:

“If the teacher gives us a topic, like food, we share together the idea. Maybe we have different ideas because our cultures are different. Even a question like ‘Why do you eat that food?’ Sometimes there is special food that you don’t eat every day, like for after the Ramadhan fast we prepare food that is only for this time.” [Flower]

The opportunity to “share together” different ideas and cultures points to the existential approach to teaching and learning where being “different” means being an individual. This is related to the idea of fluency in circle education where unique thoughts are shared in class conversations.

Circles included the third factor where learners built a learning community to spend time together in friendship and common agreement:

“The circle is democracy. I like democracy. All students are from different cultures and sometimes we speak about cultures. There are no problems, no fighting. I like that we like democracy, no fighting.” [Charliy]

Yet there were times when tensions arose in the learning community, as in any social setting. Irma explains, “I can’t make relationships, help you or help him if you are rude” [Irma]. Poppy illustrated an example where she felt unable to manage a class relationship:

“I often have a headache when [student] won’t let other people talk. Only she talks. She almost shouts to the teacher. It makes me angry but I don’t say because I don’t want to be a bad person. Sometimes it gives me stomach cramps. This is not nice because sometimes somebody wants to say but she doesn’t let them. Maybe she knows the grammar better than me but it’s not nice if she thinks only she is in the class. Everybody should have a chance to speak.” [Poppy]

The circle recognises that adult students are generally able to deal with such occasions: “We are completely different. Sometimes, we have to learn how to show respect for the others, how to stop talking and let other people talk.” [Marva], on the understanding that there are limits to people being able to work and be together independently. This lies in the fourth factor: the limits of learner autonomy in circles.

A limit of autonomy in circles is revealed when relationships and conversations breakdown and the teacher is required to step in. Another limit of autonomy in circles is related to language accuracy work as this is organised and managed by the teacher.

The stimulus texts and controlled follow-up tasks direct learning towards the skills that fulfil assessment criteria. Charliy noted how accuracy work helped with exam

tasks as such as writing criteria 2.6 for correct spelling and 3.1 to complete a form accurately:

“It helps with writing for spelling. If I read more spelling I understand about this. I can see and learn. It also helps with filling in forms. I see the form and maybe sometimes I see small words which I understand now, for example, house. I learn more words because we practise this.” [Charliy]

The limits to learners working and being together autonomously brings us to the fifth factor: the role of the teacher. The teacher has several responsibilities: planning and preparing the circle, starting the process in the class, keeping conversations and relationships going and following up with relevant input for the experience to be successful. This role looks at accuracy and controlled support:

“It is a different way to give vocabulary, how to read and have discussions, and it gives strong rules for grammar and a chance to try new thinking with the friends and the teacher. I can’t learn English without a teacher.” [Irma]

It also involves enabling opportunities for fluency and self-expression:

“I know how to compose the sentences when I have something important to do. I can use Google Translate but it does not give you the good shape of the sentence. It’s just literal. The circle gave me more control over how to express myself.” [Marva]

The circle process investigated for this project is called integrated as it links the three SfL ESOL modes within one method. Reading is pre-circle, speaking and listening form the circle and writing is post-circle. Modal integration is a surface-level way of describing circles. The focus is on language and behaviour necessary for work, training, education and social skills. It is the teacher that decides when and how to introduce and practice the skills.

A deeper view is that the three circle stages and ESOL modes integrate the concepts of accuracy with fluency, blending teacher-controlled and student-directed tasks. The emphasis is on participant conversation. Talking together is a

way for students to use language and create classroom relationships autonomously. The teacher is guided by what they hear in learners' discussions and interactions they have with learners.

Part 4: Summary of key themes

Summary

Finally, I summarise the key themes. These are the important issues for Chapter 5 that form the discussion of the areas of impact from the ESOL integrated circle investigation regarding the role of conversation and implications for learner autonomy.

The sources of data can be categorised under two headings. Firstly, quantitative data came from self- assessments and formal mock assessments of language skills. Secondly, qualitative data came from general participant feedback, self-reflections and examples of circle tasks as well as from one video transcription and six in-depth semi-structured interviews. These two strands of data can be linked to two concepts in the integrated circle process, namely language accuracy and language fluency.

The concept of language accuracy in the ESOL classroom is reminiscent of the demands of ESOL policy that limits language learning to being a preparation for work, education or training and to foster British Values. This creates a limited role for the teacher where their responsibility is to orchestrate conditions under which students are focused on achieving a limited assessment criteria through limited SfL topics.

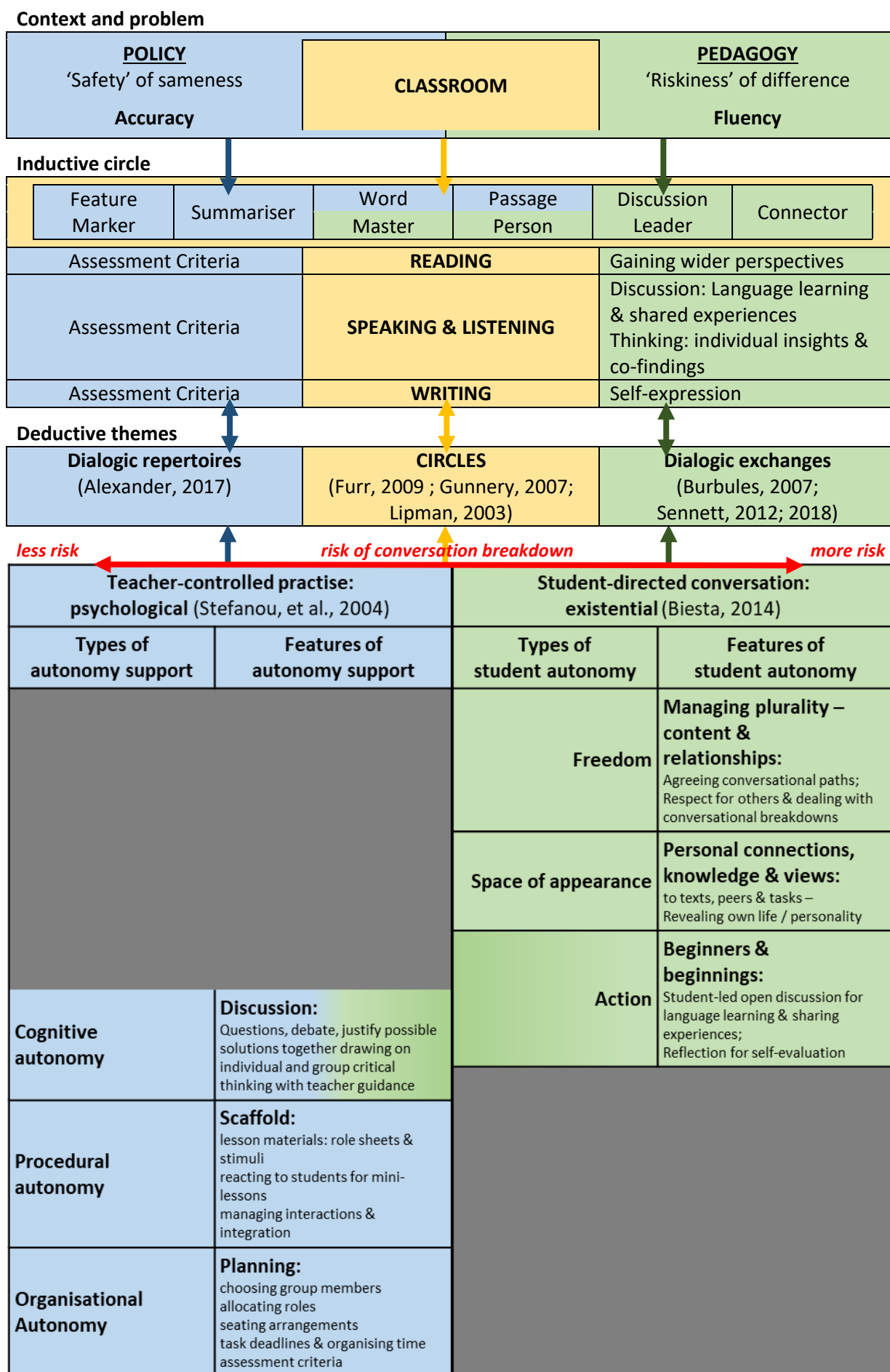
The concept of language fluency in the ESOL classroom draws on a more complex view of education. Teachers and students are recognised as individuals and encouraged to express themselves freely in a more realistic way of working together where everyone is responsible for helping each other learn language skills and maintain classroom relationships. This is perhaps more applicable to life beyond the classroom in the world of work, further education or training and general society.

The concepts of accuracy and fluency found in sources of classroom data are also visible in the literature through the process of following deductive and inductive routes to investigate the integrated circles model. By relating literature to the integrated circle classroom within the context of adult ESOL provision in the UK, it has revealed a psychological approach to education with a heightened role for the teacher and constrained learning opportunities. This is the aspect of accuracy. It also tells of a more existential approach, where classroom conversations provide a space for autonomy in teaching and learning under the theme of fluency.

The process of analysing data has enabled me to look for patterns within accuracy and fluency concepts from data arising from the classroom and deductive themes appearing from the literature review. It is possible to see the circle classroom situated between the push of policy and the pull of pedagogy, linking to Chapter 1 of this thesis. It is a classroom that uses group and individual reading, thinking, conversation and writing to develop language skills and shared understanding about the wider world, linking with Chapter 2 of this thesis.

The quantitative data conflicts with the previous experiences of circles at this institution, described in Chapter 1, where the process had a greater positive effect for accuracy seen in an increase in mock pass rates. However, the qualitative data has illuminated the other benefits of circles in terms of fluency. It helps us to see how theoretical or philosophical views of education can be expressed in this everyday teaching and learning activity.

A visual representation of the process of following deductive and inductive routes to establish the role of the integrated circles model within policy constraints and in supporting conversation and learner autonomy is shown below. It means that I was able to constantly relate literature to the integrated circle classroom and refer the classroom back to the literature, within the context of adult ESOL provision, reflecting, checking and amending inductive–deductive themes with collected data. This has allowed me to expand the initial themes identified in Chapter 3 from circles literature with a detailed overview of where integrated circles sit between contrasting but overlapping views of ESOL as a policy and a pedagogy:



4.37 Theoretical overview of integrated circles

The data has crystallised around two concepts of language accuracy and language fluency from which five key areas of impact have emerged as discussed in Part 3 of this chapter. This thesis continues with a discussion of these five aspects as the ones most significant for the ESOL integrated circle investigation, with regard to the role of conversation and implications for learner autonomy. They establish the points to follow in Chapter 6 with Conclusions and Recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion of themes and findings

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I identified five areas of impact that have become significant for the circle approach to teaching and learning. I have defined these aspects within the context of the integrated circle research project with adult ESOL learners at a Further Education college.

The project took place during a severely unsettled time at the institution with significant pressures from a financial and senior management 'fresh start'. There was a growing insistence on exam performance, as described in Chapter 1, evidenced by the rapid changing of awarding bodies, and additional weeks of internal mock exams stripping teaching and learning time away to move the ESOL classroom towards an 'exam factory' (Coffield and Williamson, 2011). The more pressure increased, the more I was concerned with offering an alternative in the classroom that could pay honest attention to learners and their learning, but could also support required business needs.

I settled on the circles approach as a method which had shown early promise in previous trials of opening up ESOL classrooms to a more student-centred experience but could also be linked to exam success. The manner in which this works can be attributed to the space the integrated circle gives in the classroom for learner autonomy balanced with the role of the teacher. These aspects highlight the concepts of fluency and accuracy in ESOL language learning for the five areas of impact.

This chapter will now probe the five major dimensions in three parts. Firstly, I will review the enduring debate around psychological and existential forms of pedagogy that underscore the historical tensions in ESOL education and define the potential for learner autonomy.

Secondly, the discussion will reflect on of the five areas that have emerged from the circle investigation. This will lead to part three of the chapter which explores implications the areas pose for ESOL education more generally.

Part 1: Reviewing the psychological and existential debate

Introduction

My discussion in Chapter 2 gave different views of education. It centred on contrasting psychological and existential accounts of teaching and learning using the work of Stefanou *et al.* (2004) and Biesta (2014).

Stefanou *et al.* (ibid.) have indicated how the psychological approach encourages 'teacher behaviors' designed to 'engineer' classroom conditions with 'supportive control' (ibid., pp.100-106) for students to complete specific learning activities and achieve specific outcomes. Such an approach is linked to the behaviourist model of education. It is seen in ESOL generally in the AECC (DfEs, 2001) and in circles specifically where activities are focused on surface-level literacy skills that aim to result in language accuracy.

In the behaviourist-accuracy model all students are assessed against the same skills to the same assessment criteria so that the learners and teachers are heading towards the same end point. This brings a safety to the classroom as everyone is dealing with the known. The concept of accuracy features in circles when participants read for detailed text comprehension and write with correct layout, structure, stock phrases, spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Biesta (2014) spells out an existential view of education that brings in more complex considerations. In this circle classroom, teachers are in partnership with students to explore language points and topics of interest or need. Such an approach is linked to social-constructivism and dialogic education. It is seen in circle discussions which are open-ended, student-led and non-linear where language is used freely to convey, question and clarify ideas.

In the existential-fluency model all participants use language to communicate their own ideas so that the learners and teachers understand topics or information in unique ways. This brings a riskiness to the classroom as everyone is dealing with the unknown. The concept of fluency features in circles when reading triggers personal connections or prompts questions that individuals need to discuss before they can be answered or to realise they need to think further. Written work builds

on individual and group reading, thinking and discussion. Language does not have to be formulaic and has the chance to be expressive.

Using the terms 'accuracy' and 'fluency' helps to capture the two traditions. It is also a useful way to explain the traditions so that they are recognisable in language teaching. This review is relevant here as the concepts of accuracy and fluency define the potential for learner autonomy in circles.

Accuracy and fluency are not mutually exclusive. There is a degree of overlap between the two concepts. A certain command of language is essential to be able to communicate effectively with others and to complete essential daily tasks which SfL suggests. Fluency extends what it is possible to achieve with language from the mundane to the colourful. However, fluency cannot be reached without first having grasped matters of accuracy. Therefore, students cannot make autonomous use of language without first being guided step-by-step through learning stages and having space to make learning mistakes. The teacher provides training wheels and once these are removed it can take time for students to regain balance and set off in new directions to apply their acquired language skills independently in contexts beyond the SfL programme. You can learn something well in a controlled environment but that is not the same as independent recall and use during real-time communication. Shaky first attempts are visible in the difference between accurately completing controlled grammar drills compared to inaccurate grammar in free conversations. Simply having been shown the 'correct' way in scaffolded activities does not mean it will translate to 'correct' use instantaneously. There can be a slipping backwards, before gaining traction and moving forwards.

However, for those teaching and learning ESOL, accuracy is a simpler concept to talk about. The AECC (DfES, 2001), awarding bodies' assessment criteria and exam mark schemes make accuracy easy to see. Teachers, students and assessors have universal measures to judge class tasks and mark exams against.

It is a much more complicated business to produce a mark scheme for fluency. Judgements would become more subjective if assessments were not about

identifying if a learner uses a range of grammar structures in a presentation, for example, but how beautifully they express their ideas.

Accuracy and fluency pull in different directions and the lure of easy-to-mark skills can drown out the other. Evidencing accuracy through exam success is an important contribution to the business profile of the institution. Exam success is equally important for students and their future life plans. A circle can support these technical outcomes and it can offer space for fluency with opportunities for learner autonomy. It is to the issue of autonomy in circles that this thesis now turns.

Autonomy and key aspects of circles

Investigating the possible presence of autonomy in circles allows me to draw together some insights gleaned from Stefanou *et al.* (ibid.), alongside the similarities and differences found between the authors of relevant literature on circles methods and factors.

Firstly, the discussion of autonomy support enables me to identify who is responsible for providing different types of scaffolding and where these appear in the stages of the circle method in practice, as the table below shows. This has been compiled from the strategies associated with the different features of autonomy support identified by Stefano *et al.* (ibid., p.101).

Responsible person	Types of autonomy support		
	Organisational	Procedural	Cognitive
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocates groups • Plans session content and deadlines • Issues set assessment criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocates roles • Chooses texts and tasks • Provides support resources: dictionaries and highlighters, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listens to and questions circle discussions • Provides follow-up tasks to consolidate and extend learning
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage seating arrangements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handle texts and role sheets • Complete individual roles and tasks • Use support resources and own tools • Discuss learning needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogic interaction to share multiple perspectives (mis)understandings justifications questions and answers connections • Use knowledge, experiences and interests to complete tasks • Self-reflection and

			evaluation
Both		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep discussions going 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give time • Co-write discussion summaries • Give feedback

5.1 Types of autonomy support

As the students learn with and from each other, they can develop their own ways of thinking about the topics discussed plus their individual language learning needs. In this way, students are not only working as members of a group but are also working as individuals which can enable the development of an individual learning autonomy.

Secondly, the idea of autonomy support offers a way to understand the complicated, interwoven benefits of circles. These are not only the development of reading, writing, speaking and listening, thinking and social skills, but the development of an independence (Duncan, 2012) at the same time as a group identity.

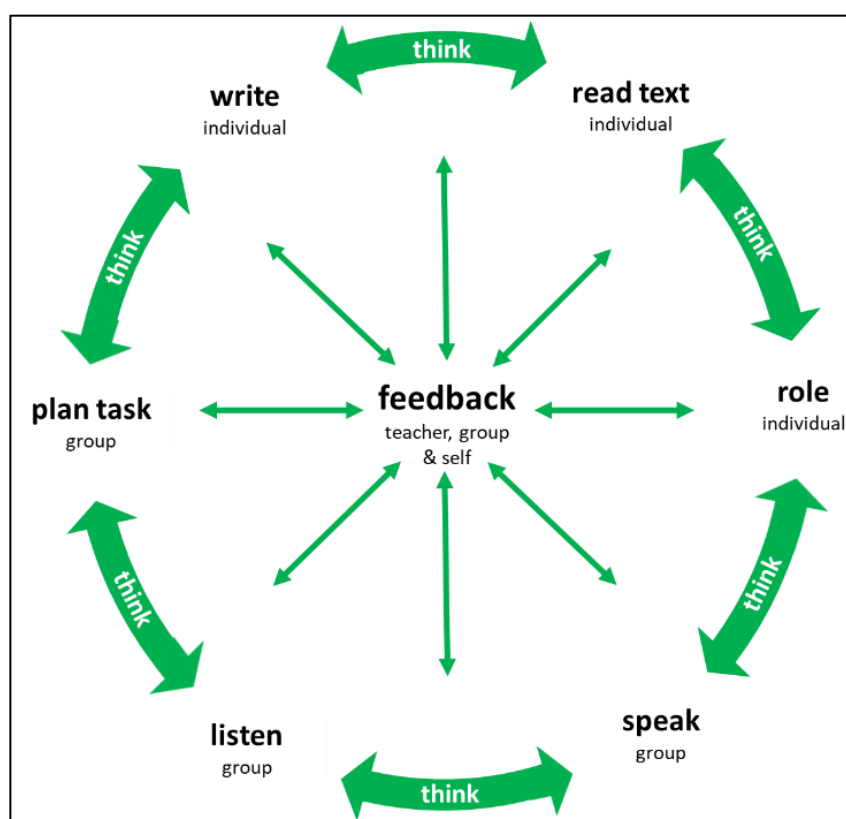
There is an inherent contradiction in the workings of a circle. The use of teacher-controlled instructions and organisation appears at odds with the goal of developing independent students. Yet, when these two opposing practices combine they seem to offer a method in which ‘it may be the structure and guidance that help to foster autonomy’ (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004, p.109).

For the integrated circle, the mix of organisational, procedural and cognitive autonomy support, with the emphasis on the latter, could be the ‘magic’ that Furr sees when students engage in ‘open, natural conversations about stories’ with ‘a spirit of playfulness and fun’ (2009, pp.6-12) . There is an enthusiasm and interest in Furr’s (*ibid.*) classroom that could rest on cognitive autonomy support being ‘the essential ingredient without which motivation and engagement may not be maximized’ (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004, p.109) as it offers students ‘a great deal of control over how to think about their academic tasks’ (*ibid.*, p.104).

The combined autonomy support mechanism available illuminates my on-going concern with the role of conversation in circles: student discussions about stimulus material are scaffolded by their allocated roles, some of which focus on more

surface level, instrumental language needed for accuracy and others for more creative responses about making statements, expressing identity and being heard. These combine to assist students working out how to complete an immediate classroom task, and for future use both inside and outside the class, from their 'unique discoveries, common goals' (Gunnery, 2007, p.12).

We need to have a grasp of both the technical and fluency aspects of language in order to be able to communicate our ideas, thoughts and feelings well. Basic spelling, grammar, punctuation and skills tested by awarding bodies' assessment criteria enable us to connect our speech together in a logical coherent fashion, whilst the other breathes life into our words. These are the building blocks for circle work; for individual reading, writing and thinking which shows itself in the group discussions. The discussions then provide space for teacher, peer and self-feedback to lead to group and individual language development. It's an active-reflective-developmental cycle as this diagrams aims to represent:



5.2 The integrated cycle

Students can access this cycle at the point where their current ability allows. For example, some students may feel more confident at an active listening stage

rather than oral contribution stage but, by having to express their ideas with their friends, they are building up ability to communicate and contribute further.

In addition, if the student can make a personal connection to the text to bring to, or discover a connection during, the discussion, then this can give the topic real relevance and significance. The discovery of a connection could equally be how a text or peer reveals very different experiences as much as how they might reflect similar daily routines or cultural traditions. Language learning at that point is more than a theoretical literacy point to be mastered through cognitive development but a social process.

Alexander (2017) sets out how the view that talking with others is critical for learning is built on Vygotsky's (1978) approach to child development. Group interaction with a 'more capable peer' is important for learners to 'construct meaning not only from the interplay of what they newly encounter and what they already know, but also from interaction with others' (Alexander, 2017, p.11).

The central role of talking for learning in circle work binds the method to the principle of Alexander's dialogic teaching (ibid.), but in relation to adult learners rather than to school pupils. In a parallel to Alexander (ibid.), circles are a move away from 'transmissive pedagogies' to a 'more open and processual' view of knowledge' that encourages a more personalised learning experience in a classroom that enables student voice, assessment for learning and learning to learn (ibid., pp.32-34).

The circle benefits from a twofold process of group and individual learning which can eventually help guide students towards a freedom from the teacher and each other. This autonomy starts where students decide the points they discuss in their circle. The teacher has no control over the discussion points identified by students from their individual reading and thinking, nor which ones are pursued or discarded in the group discussion. The students decide these matters for themselves. Although the texts and roles provide a structure to initiate the conversation, each circle group will follow its own unique discussion path, depending on student interests and needs. Therefore, no two conversations follow the exact same route. Non-linear discussions are a natural aspect of circle groups.

Part of the group dynamic is learning to manage conversations, including listening well, asking questions, presenting and justifying ideas, respecting turn taking, dealing with disagreements, respecting different points of view, and deciding when to call on help from outside the circle (from the teacher or peers). Alexander notes how these form generic citizenship skills necessary for critically thinking and articulate citizens in the world at large (ibid., pp.33-34) – and this implies that circle work can also support the aims of British Values as citizenship education is woven into the sharing of learning via democratic and participatory discussions.

The teacher organises elements of the circle necessary to set it running, such as the pre-teach, introductory sessions, choosing the texts, allocating roles, organising the groups, follow-up sessions to help ‘close gaps’ and setting the writing tasks. Even these may gradually start to be owned by the students as they become more aware of their reading preferences and learning needs, so that they may negotiate with their teacher work to be included.

This calls on teachers to be flexible and responsive rather than to rigidly follow a scheme of work or lesson plan. This may be an unsettling situation for those who are used to the security of teacher control, and it can be as uncomfortable for students as it is for teachers or their managers. It takes time to establish understanding of the circle method and it takes time for language skills and community spirit to develop. Part of the process of introducing circles is to accept that some students may be confused about what is expected of them and that ‘becoming cognitively autonomous may need considerable support and practice’ (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004, p.107).

A key concern with using circles is that they take time to establish (Gunnery, 2007). Teachers need to be prepared to commit several weeks of modelling and trying out the method with their classes before students are confident to take it on themselves. One benefit of the circle is the staging of activities to limit cognitive overload. At each point the students are either working on an individual specific task from a range of many, or pooling knowledge with their small group, whole class or teacher.

It must also be noted that students will come to the circle group as individuals with all the differences in language and learning skills that represents. Not everyone learns the same things at the same pace, or in the same way. The circle method cannot be a silver bullet for adult ESOL education but it can provide one example of a more processual view of teaching and learning, grounded in its potential to open up opportunities for greater student autonomy.

Thinking about autonomy and key aspects of circles returns the discussion to the concepts of accuracy and fluency and how they are interlinked. Accuracy tends to have the upper hand in education as the means of evidencing the ability to use the skills, and complete the tasks, necessary to obtain qualifications and employment. Fluency enables learners to complete the same tasks but with individual meaning and creativity. In the early stages of learning, fluency will lack the fine control that accuracy demands but enables learners to express themselves in powerful ways. Yet, fluency needs a working knowledge of basic communication skills at the very least in order to exist. For circles, participants need to have an understanding of what the basic process entails so that their informal learning conversations of interesting ideas can take place.

Looking at accuracy and fluency in the integrated circle investigation has identified five key areas of impact which go to support or limit student autonomy. These are addressed in Part 2 below.

Part 2: The five areas of impact

A critical reflection

In Chapter 4, I noted that data collection had followed two routes. The quantitative route was directed towards psychological-accuracy approaches and the qualitative route was focused on existential-fluency approaches within circles.

Quantitative data show the circle experience had little impact on the participants' self-assessment of language skills or mock exam results in the two years data was collected. It might be argued from an accuracy point of view that an integrated circle has little value in the classroom compared to the relative success of the individual reading and writing circles reported in Chapter 1.

However, a contributing factor to the poor results was the decision taken by senior managers to change the dates of the second round of mock exams in both years. This had two unfortunate consequences.

Firstly, it compromised the sequencing of the integrated circle process. The second self-assessments were due to take place before the second mock exams. The rationale for this was to record learners own opinions of their progress.

This had a significant impact because once the second mocks were taken ahead of the planned sequence they influenced the participants' self-assessments. This was revealed by Baiba who wanted to know what her mock exam marks were before she completed her self-assessment: "I don't know what I should put here, what score. I want to know my exam mark for this." [Baiba]. The formally assessed results were more powerful indicators of ability than personal progress in class activities and in daily life.

Secondly, by making learners take an assessment earlier than planned, teachers lost opportunities to present and consolidate the required language skills. Learners lost the time needed to practise and extend these skills. The difficulty this raised was not lost on the participants: "Learning is step by step - not MOVE! For writing you need more, more, more practice" [Shima].

The quantitative data from technical language work does not support the idea of an integrated ESOL circle. However, beyond accuracy considerations, qualitative data is a rich source of information to look for ways the circle can be effective. This is where we find five key impacts that have emerged from participant experience.

Impact 1: Reciprocal language learning

Reciprocal language learning is a feature of accuracy and a necessary stepping stone towards language fluency. Accuracy is evident when circle participants help each other to understand and use aspects of language that Clarke (2001) identifies as being part of surface-level literacy, which fits with education as a psychological exercise (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004). In the integrated circle, the theme of accuracy appears in learner conversations about spelling, punctuation,

grammar, writing content and layout, reading for direct information, word definitions and pronunciation. By talking about these things together, participants share knowledge about the language skills needed to achieve assessment criteria and to pass exams.

In an example of reciprocal language accuracy learning, Zack pointed out the benefits of group conversation to help learn about basic language points from each other. Conversations like this support the psychological route to language mastery focusing on a technical process of correctness (Gunnery, 2007), for areas that can be termed as accuracy:

'We talked about the skills we are learning. They don't understand all the rules of punctuation (full stops, capital letters). We also found the rule for present continuous...For the writing tasks some student[s] said that using the linking word[s] were hard to use. For speaking task[s], some of the students found it hard to pronounce some of the longer words. Also, spelling was a problem for most of us.' [Zack]

By working in groups, participants helped each other to understand key language skills. The following example came from reading a transcript of a SfL complaint audio used to set the context to write a complaint letter. Farima talked as the Feature Marker. Her role was to identify specific punctuation marks or language features in a text. She raised one punctuation mark, then other members of her discussion group went on to clarify understanding of two additional punctuation marks and pronunciation.

Farima:	Page 1, column 1. 'How can I help you?' is a question mark and start by 'How' capital and why I choose it, because if someone asks us "How are you?", it's help me someone.
Daisy:	You not choose this one for the circle. [<i>Pointing to ellipsis</i>].
Farima:	I don't know that one.
Daisy:	It's just like dot, dot, dot. Et cetera. More. Like that.
Red:	Oh, it continues then?
Daisy:	Yes, it goes on. And this – this is a comma.
Poppy:	No, it's not a comma. It's a short way.
Rose:	Like a post-fee.
Lily:	Apostrof.
Rose:	Yes, apostrophe.
Daisy:	Po-po-postrophe. [<i>Giggles</i>]. [<i>All laugh</i>].

Rose:	We salute you. [<i>Miming a salute action and smiling</i>].
Daisy:	I learn today this word.

The more learners become capable language users, the more options they have to use language fluently. However, not all students felt they were in a position to learn with, and from, peers at the time of the circle project. This is because individuals do not start with, nor develop, the same skills or level of confidence at the same rate. Charliy expressed mixed opinions about circle participation:

“I didn’t understand much about the circle because it was not easy for me. In my country I did not study writing or speaking. This was the first time for me to do that so it wasn’t easy. I liked it because I want to learn more and after I can speak better. Some people are good at speaking. Sometimes I don’t understand them because sometimes they speak better than me. I learnt but I need more speaking... The forms [role sheets] are hard. I don’t understand about that. It is not easy for me to know the right words to write on the paper. I think it was not good for me because I didn’t understand the form. It’s new.” [Charliy]

Yet for others learning together was the way to learn about circles as a new process. Student conversations helped each other to understand the procedures of circle roles so that they could participate more independently. Learning with their group helped individuals to work autonomously.

“At the beginning, it was confusing but when I shared ideas [in the circle] it was better because I understood the job I had to do and I could do it myself.” [Poppy]

Charliy and Poppy made comments relevant for the issue of learner engagement raised in Chapter 4. Lack of engagement can be a result of the circle process being new and confusing causing learners to lack self-confidence. Not knowing what to do is significant for two aspects of impact: the limitations of learner autonomy and what this means for the role of the teacher. The issues Charliy raised about beginning to learn a new learning process at the same time as beginning to learn a new language focuses attention on accuracy, or in other words being able to do the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, with the

right language. The teacher is called upon to generate the right technical conditions to make this possible for learners (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004).

Charliy also spoke about confidence to participate. Circles can be an exposing experience as it reveals the limits of individuals' current language abilities and understandings of the new learning process. Poppy's words help us to see the organisational and procedural (ibid) challenge a circle can present to learners before they can take it on autonomously, or with fluency. Circle participants are beginners (Biesta, 2014). They are beginning to feel confident in a new classroom community, beginning to take independent action in learning with and from other people and beginning to see how this can transform their knowledge.

Impact 2: Transforming ideas by sharing experiences

The extracts above indicate how a circle can focus on the mechanics of language and the circle process itself when participants share what they know about the world of ESOL from perspectives gained inside the classroom. These are conversations that fall on the side of accuracy and the psychological approach to learning.

However, circle conversations are not restricted to technical matters. Participants also share what they know about the wider world around them from the perspective of their own life experience outside the classroom.

When a circle participant talks about a personal experience, they allow others to see the world through their eyes, thoughts and feelings. This can transform how others see, think and feel about the shared events (Duncan 2012). Transforming ideas by sharing experience locates on the side of fluency. Grammatical accuracy in speech may suffer but participants are putting their language to significant use.

In the integrated circle, the theme of fluency appears in learner conversations that involve the personal: where participants make and share personal connections. This can stimulate a new beginning in the classroom as participants talk and think about things that are important to them and others come to think about things in new ways. This type of conversation is different to the accuracy-focused conversations students have when they help each other with required skills. In

conversations about experiences, participants can come to their own individual conclusions about new ideas.

In addition, sharing experiences is a way for learners to find a place in the learning community. It can be a disorientating experience to start a new life in a new country with a new language and culture. Coming to understand that there are others like you in the classroom can transform the setting from a formal place of learning to a place of informal relationships, too.

In an illustration of the personal in circle discussions, Tinca expresses how group conversations help everybody learn about the wider world from the benefit of others' experiences. Conversations like this support language learning as a social construction of understanding where there is space for people to say the things they want and need to say and hear. This is allied with the fluency aspect of circles:

“I think this is a very important part of learning. The speaking together lets me find out what is true. When I ask [*student*] a question about Sudan - Is it Sudan? Yes, Sudan - I am asking her to tell me. She knows. She has been there, seen these things. She can tell me. I can learn more than from books or the internet. They give me information yes, but it's not the same thing as someone who really knows. Maybe the books and internet are written to be careful, not to upset anybody. Here we can learn the truth.” [Tinca]

Tinca illustrates how circle participants discuss genuine matters, rather than artificial SfL situations, as they share personal anecdotes about lived experience. This is a part of every circle conversation. Some exchanges serve to underscore similarities between participants and to validate experience. Being recognised and understood is an important part of settling into a new community.

This extract was generated by the Connector's role. A Connector looks for similarities or differences between a stimulus text and their own daily routine or culture. The group had been reading a newspaper article about a local 'Race For Life' event. The Connector, Malla, introduced her country's cultural expectations

for charitable donations to her discussion group. Berevan and Taha identified with Malla but it was a new idea for Darius:

Malla:	In my country if you have an accident, like a car crash, but live, you give money to charity to say thank you for being alive.
Berevan:	Yes, in my country after you have a bad dream and wake up, you give money.
Darius:	I don't understand why you give money. You are O.K.
Taha:	It's to say thanks, to be grateful for the good things.
Darius:	I think that's the problem: people only remember bad things.
Malla:	That's why their tradition is important – to celebrate happy things.
Darius:	You know, I think talking like this together is very important for us: to know other culture is very important for us; to explore together, to learn about each other.

The examples from Tinca and Malla highlight how circle discussions can be deeper than those about surface-level language skills as participants share their life experiences. Conversations like this are a reminder of the opportunity for learners' knowledge and understanding to become broader through 'a fusion of horizons' (Gadamer 1975, cited in Scott and Usher, 1996, p.19) noted in Chapter 3. Conversations with space for learners to learn about each other and from each other clarify the difference between accuracy and fluency in circle dialogue.

Talk about language skill accuracy is limited as it can only go as far as the correct answer. Learners are aided along the accuracy journey by the teacher who leads the way to the final destination. Talk about personal experiences features fluency as it is free to travel down many different routes. Conversational paths are chosen by the participants to follow topics that are meaningful to them as individuals.

Autonomous conversations fit in with the theme of fluency through the concept of beginnings (Biesta, 2014). In the circle context, a new conversation is a beginning. It requires the spark of an idea in one participant to start a conversation. It requires at least one other to listen, take up that idea and join in. The interaction between the participants produces more beginnings as the original idea is discussed and shifts so that new trains of thought emerge. Viewing student-led discussions as beginnings is a counterbalance to the theme of accuracy evident in impact one: reciprocal language learning.

A useful way to see fluency and accuracy side by side in circles is via dialogic pedagogy (Alexander 2015; 2017). Reciprocal language learning see participants drawing on the teaching talk (Alexander, 2017, pp.38-39) strategies of rote, recitation and instruction or exposition to build accuracy. The teaching talk strategies of discussion and dialogue (ibid., p.39) support fluency as they make it possible for learners to talk together in less structured and more autonomous ways (ibid., pp.39-40).

Fluency offers the type of open conditions that cannot exist in the accuracy-focused classroom which produces target language for a specific SfL scenario. The contexts SfL language are presented through pushes communication to the transactional element of everyday talk (ibid., p.38). The wide-ranging, informal, personalised conversations students have lean towards interrogatory, explanatory, expressive and evaluative talk (ibid., p.38).

In Chapter 2, I noted that adult ESOL circle participants can extend these forms of group talk to include autonomous self-communication, or individual talk, as they think their learning through independently. There is a link to the psychological point of working on students' minds to mould cognitive autonomy as teachers guide participants in their asking of questions, debating and justifying possible answers in individual and group critical thinking (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004). Yet, there is also room for participants to take their own actions as beginners. Conversation is a way to learn about language, to share experiences, to respond to the group on what is shared and to self-reflect on what this means personally. Circle conversations are a 'space of appearance' (Arendt, cited in Biesta, 2014, p.107) where sharing personal connections, knowledge and views to texts, peers and tasks reveals different experiences and personalities.

Through the dialogic classroom, Alexander (2017) provides an example of accuracy and fluency working in tandem. He confirms that one implies the other. This is a feature of the integrated circle. In the teacher-led technical process, language accuracy and fluency are bound together across the circle roles. Accuracy and fluency are evident in student-led discussions where students become peer teachers for each other regarding language learning and learning about each other.

Dialogic conversations are important for building relationships. Sharing personal experiences enables participants to gain a sense of each other. This helps different people, with all their differences, to gain an understanding of each other through the sharing of those differences. This is opposite to the view put forward by Sennett (2018, p.143) that difference can be a wedge between people. The circle can move from being a group of strangers or 'others' to a community as long as the individuals involved are willing to be tolerant of difference (Biesta, 2014, pp.116-117) with a cosmopolitan (Burbules, 2007, p.515) understanding. In circles, this is a community of learners and in some cases of friendship where Flower, for example, now calls Poppy her "sister" [Flower].

Bonds, forged through conversation, occur naturally. They are not contrived by a psychological manoeuvre by the teacher. A circle has a freedom (Biesta, 2014, p.104) for participants to manage their own relationships, both positive and negative. Budding friendships can help learners like Charli start to feel at ease in a dialogic circle where learning language skills together includes learning about each other and learning to be together in respectful and co-operative ways (Sennett, 2018). The circle classroom can support the building of a learning community.

Impact 3: Building a learning community

The circle community emerges as the participants agree a common understanding of what the circle is. On one side, common understandings are needed between participants, as peer learners and peer teachers, and class teacher for the accurate working of the circle as a process: the language focus of the separate roles, the tasks individuals are required to complete, the forming of small groups, organising the seating for circle discussions, what happens after the circle and how student work is assessed against the awarding body's criteria.

A classroom community based on accuracy is teacher-controlled. It focuses on the psychological, organisational and procedural aspects of teaching and learning. The teacher, as an authority figure, stipulates the circle rules and regulations and relies on students to comply.

On another side, a different set of common agreements are needed for the fluent working of the circle between individuals. The focus is on the personal experience of circles and what it takes to get along with different people.

The circle community values relationships. Although the integrated circle starts out as a teacher-led exercise, it expands through participant freedom to manage the plurality (Biesta, 2014, p.104) of the circle group. Plurality can be in terms of conversation content as in impact 2 transforming ideas by sharing experience, and in coping with interactions (Sennett, 2018). The latter idea features in learning communities that involve accuracy as well as fluency and is considered below.

3a. Building common agreement

The theme of accuracy in the circle community is indicated by Tinca. Tinca noted how participants became a community of learners through regular practice of the circle format and coming to understand the circle requirement to form small discussion groups. The teacher did not have to direct this. Students completed this organisational aspect autonomously: “Yes, because we have experience and we know what to do now. We are ready” [Tinca].

Part of being “ready” for the circle entailed being conscious and accommodating of the breadth of difference in the group in order to establish a common agreement to learn with others. This was a living example of ‘being-together-in-plurality’ (Arendt cited in Biesta, 2014, p.104) beyond the psychological approach of instilling social cohesion or British Values. Marva explained this:

“The circle shows us not to be rude. Sometimes, it is just ignorance when we are rude. I do not consider myself rude but if don’t use the right words then it seems like I am rude but it’s just my own lack of knowledge. We all come from different backgrounds, countries, education, culture and religions. We are completely different. Sometimes, we have to learn how to show respect for the others, how to stop talking and let other people talk.”
[Marva]

Marva’s comments illustrated how being with other people does not always run smoothly. There can be occasions where a mix of personalities clash: some

participants are not naturally warm and friendly, some are culturally unaware of the effects their actions have on others and some misconstrue others' intentions. Such incidents can cause tensions in the learning community.

3b. Dealing with tensions in the learning community

Not all classroom relationships are as strong as the one identified between Flower and Poppy. Frustrations can arise between any of the participants, disturbing the community. Encountering a disturbance is being faced with an unknown moment. At that time of uncertainty, all participants need to make a judgement about how to react to others. If you see the disturbance as a beginning, not the end of a situation, it can lead to new learning moments.

3bi. An example of student-student tension: “Why don’t you speak English?”

After three weeks of circle discussions, Gigi, from East Europe, heatedly asked this question as her group began. The student being questioned, Rimoonna from the Middle East, had joined in week two and had been assessed as emerging at E3 speaking and listening, whereas Gigi was established. The new student was very shy and preferred working with her first language peers. Her circle classmate, Zari, came to her defence to explain that she was new and nervous about speaking in front of other people. Gigi's reply was:

“Yes, but if you don’t try, you will never learn. When I came to England, I couldn’t speak English but I go to work and I have to speak English so now I am better.” [Gigi]

What Gigi missed in this exchange is how her life experiences and opportunities may have been very culturally different to Rimoonna's. It also did not recognise Rimoonna as a language beginner.

Peer intervention helped to smooth relationships. I also mediated by temporarily diverting participants to reflect on difference in the group and what it can mean to be accepting of it. My involvement here was an attempt to prevent the language learning conversation deteriorating. In addition, it was an attempt to prevent the

community disintegrating and a response to the limits of the cosmopolitan model of dialogue (Burbules 2007, p.515).

The tension in dialogue provided an opportunity to question different views and opened a way for participants to learn about each other, to recognise diversity and to start to be accommodating of their differences. Being accommodating includes being patient with those at different stages in their language development to you. This mind-set recognises that not everyone learns the same things at the same rate which has implications for accuracy and the pressure for students to pass exams in set timeframes.

3bii. An example of student-teacher tension: “It’s boring.”

I overheard Rose loudly whispering this to her group when they were starting their discussion based on a graded health text. In that instant, I was faced with a choice to ask her about her comment, or to let the moment pass. I decided on the latter as she had not meant me to hear, and intervening at that point would have interrupted the conversation.

As the discussion developed and talk turned to unpicking the health scenarios and advice given in the text, the conversation became more meaningful to Rose. By the end she noted, “I enjoy it now because I am speaking with other people and we learn more about it” [Rose].

Her initial reaction was relevant for learner engagement raised in Chapter 4. Lack of engagement can result when circle stimulus material is not interesting for participants. On this occasion Rose found a connection through conversation to the material but if she had still found the circle boring it could have led to finding out more about why that was the case, and what action we could take, for example, to bring in other texts. Circle stimulus material is significant for the fifth impact: the role of the teacher.

The teacher is not generally party to circle discussions as these are student-led. The teacher’s role initially centres on creating ripe conditions for rich discussion. However, as the participants are language beginners there is another role to step in at certain times to assist participants with their conversational paths. Learners

can invite the teacher in to help them or the teacher might decide to join in when they see a need to support learner autonomy.

The type of community that exists in the integrated circle connects to both accuracy and fluency. Accuracy lives where it is important to get things right. It can be seen in rote learning and in fixed lesson procedures. This is ESOL by lockstep.

A learning community that focuses tightly on controlled ways of learning and being together is likely to be a hierarchical one with the teacher as group commander and font of knowledge. This a commonly recognised ESOL teaching and learning set up and, because it is familiar, any changes to it can be unsettling for participants. For example, the action of self-reflection to assess own learning and next steps was perplexing to Anna who is used to a teacher telling her what to learn and when to learn it. Taking time to actively thinking about her own learning prompted this statement: “No class today. The lesson is not active” [Anna]. It takes time to adjust to the new ways of learning and being that circles offer.

A circle is not as regimented as the standard contemporary ESOL experience. It still asks ESOL learners to learn but in a looser and wider fashion under the theme of fluency. The participants themselves are sources of knowledge for each other and the teacher learns alongside them about different ways of seeing the world. It is acceptable for the teacher not to have all of the answers all of the time because that is a natural reflection of being a person in the real world.

The group is not managed from the top down but from within, as participants are expected to play a role in developing their community. The diversity in an ESOL classroom can create difficulties for relationships (Burbules, 2007) and learning. Participants may fail to understand each other on an interpersonal level such as Gigi and Rimona above. Participants may lack the detailed language knowledge to be able to help each other accurately. Difficulties like these indicate that the circle is not completely self-governing so there are limits to learner autonomy in them.

Impact 4: The limitations of learner autonomy in circles

There are times when circle participants are unable to move their discussions forward due to a gap in their English language knowledge. This belongs to Arendt's concept of participants as beginners (Biesta, 2014) learning a new language. Conversations may stick over any number of language issues. At these times students may request their teacher's support, or the teacher may step in to prompt learning. Support requests or interventions could both be for instrumental needs of accuracy such as spelling, punctuation, grammar, layout and text, task or circle role comprehension or to support freer, more fluent work. Support techniques identified in circles include direct supply, open and closed questions, echoing and rephrasing (Clarke, 2001).

4a. Accuracy support

This circle extract is taken from a discussion about a graded text, 'Studying? Is it worth it?' from the course book '*Language To Go*' (Crace, A. and Wileman, R., 2002, pp.10-11). The text tells the stories of Gavin and Carl and their different career paths. The stories provide examples of comparatives and superlatives in the context of education and work.

Elako was the Discussion Leader. She focused on paragraph 4 of the text which she believed said that Gavin stopped working because he was old and tired. First, she questioned her group to see if they agreed with her. Then she called on me as the teacher for support:

Elako:	Why do you think he's too old for working?
Habebee	Oh, he's still working.
Elako:	This paragraph [<i>Pointing to paragraph 4 in the text</i>]. He thinks the job must be for new people now. I'll pass you the job because you're younger than me. I'm tired now. What do you think Sarah?
Me:	Well, did he stop working because he was tired?
Qali:	It was his age. 'It's harder for me than young people'. [<i>Quoting from the text</i>].
Me:	Is that why he stopped working?
Habebee:	Oh no, the university said because he was the most expensive.
Me:	So, is working harder for him? [<i>Students re-read the text</i>]. What does it say in the paragraph?
Chorus:	Training.
Elako:	Training for another job - a new job is harder.

When Elako invited me to join in her circle conversation, it was to help her with her initial question and her self-formed answer: “Why do you think he's too old for working? He thinks the job must be for new people now. I'll pass you the job because you're younger than me. I'm tired now” [Elako].

At this moment, Elako was talking about her reading comprehension skills. This is a matter of accuracy classed as Ascentis assessment criteria 1.1 to identify the main points in short straightforward text and criteria 1.2 to identify the main events in short straightforward text (Ascentis, 2017, p.24).

By interpreting the main point of the text as being Gavin's age, Elako was unable to demonstrate accurate reading comprehension which led her to produce an inaccurate question. Her misreading of the text made it difficult for her circle colleagues to respond to her question because there was no correct answer for it in the text. Elako's request for support resulted in a teacher-led intervention to guide the participants to the right information needed to gain the right comprehension to identify the main point.

Incidents like this are indicative of the limits of learner autonomy in reciprocal language learning for accuracy in circles. They also point to a need in circles for the controlled psychological approach to learning a teacher provides to assist learners as language beginners.

4b. Fluency prompt

In this example, Habebbee lead the circle discussing a graded extract from ‘*The Secret Garden*’ (Hodgson Burnett, F., 2008). Her initial question was one of fluency as the answer was not directly contained in the text. The reader had to infer the information from other clues in the text. Inference is not an assessed skill for E3 ESOL. Instead, learners are used to answering reading questions with multiple choice answers knowing that they are looking for the single accurate answer.

In the circle conversation, Julia understood that the answer could not be found by reading the text alone but could not offer more, whilst Roz and Baiba were confused. As the teacher, the decision to intervene offered cognitive support for

the participants to think beyond the literal and procedural support to help restart their lapsed conversation:

Habebee:	How long after she left her parents did she arrive in England?
Roz:	Mrs Medlock.
Habebee:	How long?
Julia:	No have information.
Habebee:	Just for example. [<i>All circle members pause</i>].
Baiba:	About this? [<i>Pointing to the text</i>] [<i>Habebee nods</i>] [<i>All remain silent</i>].
Me:	[<i>Observing the group struggling</i>] Habebee is asking you a question about this text, but you can't find the answer in the text. She's asking you to look behind the words. Sometimes, when we read we can see the answer in the words, but for questions like this the answer isn't there in front of you. You have to think behind the words on the paper. What can you see behind those words?
Roz	I think 15 or 16.
Habebee:	OK. Next!

My guidance to the learners to “think behind the words” was a challenge to step beyond the narrow way of reading that usually features in ESOL. I was asking the participants to join Habebee in stretching thinking beyond the literal. This can be seen as a beginning or a new action. Looking “behind the words” means searching for what is not immediately obvious and making sense from other clues in the text that resonate with the reader. There is space here for readers to use intuition to think about the text in different ways to standard SfL reading tasks. Participants are bringing their instincts gained from personal life experiences and previous reading encounters to the text. Making life-text connections recalls Carter (2000, p.2) ‘relating life with text, text with life, seeing the links’ which confirms that reading, and the thinking and talking about reading, can mean more than demonstrating assessed skills.

Intuition flows throughout the integrated circle where participants have free choice. For learners, this is choosing the points to complete their individual circle roles, choosing what they contribute to group conversations and following or discarding discussion points. The class teacher chooses stimulus texts she feels are likely to generate learning conversations, how to organise and manage initial groupings and which follow-up tasks are likely to be needed. With such a freedom comes the chance for all participants to follow ideas that ‘shine out’ (Flyvberg, 2004) to them. This shows a different aspect of the analogy expressed in Chapter 3 between me

as the teacher in the classroom and the researcher looking at data as it includes learners in the experience. All those involved in the circle make new beginnings with each new choice which create new learning moments for individuals and the group.

In the extract above, Habebee was happy to move the circle conversation on immediately her question was answered and the group members were willing to follow this direction, but the point at which this conversation stalled illustrates a role for the teacher as student-led discussions are in progress. The teacher is actively listening to monitor for where fluency autonomy support is needed in the circle as much as accuracy. Teacher support is required in the circle for learners as beginner language learners, peer teachers and community builders.

Impact 5: The role of the teacher

The four areas above illustrate how learners have space to move their class in personal directions but they do not participate in a circle completely devoid of teacher support. The teacher plays a vital role in establishing, maintaining and extending circles. The teacher's function encompasses accuracy and fluency support for ESOL circle participants.

5a. A responsibility for accuracy

The AECC (DfES, 2001) defines an accuracy role for the teacher. To fulfil this role, teachers must produce detailed lesson plans and maintain comprehensive individual learner records against Basic Skills Standards level descriptors and curriculum references for component skills, knowledge and understanding. Categorising language like this is a way to monitor for the successful application of skills in activities engineered to evidence language accuracy in work, education and training contexts.

For the integrated circle project, as the teacher, I had to be mindful of the demand for accuracy. The demand is encapsulated in the progress and performance data needed for the institution's records. As circle methods use defined roles to structure discussions, the integrated roles had to be designed in such a way as to take the tight assessment criteria into consideration to work towards SfL exams.

To find the links between integrated circle roles and the required assessment criteria I made a map of the awarding body's unit specifications to the circle roles. At the time this project started, the college was registered with the English Speaking Board (ESB) for ESOL qualifications and that meant looking at the ESB (2016) learning outcomes and assessment criteria for SfL exams due in the academic year 2017/18. The same criteria is used by Ascentis and applied to the second active project year 2018/19. Each ESOL mode of reading, writing, speaking and listening has its own respective ESB reference table as below:

Adult ESOL Core Curriculum Reference	Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will:</i>	Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>
Rt/E3.1a Rt/E3.4a Rs/E3.1a Rs/E3.1b Rs/E3.2a Rw/E3.1a Rw/E3.2a	1. Be able to gain meaning from text	1.1 Identify the main points of short straightforward text 1.2 Identify main events in short straightforward text 1.3 Use language features to identify meaning in short straightforward text 1.4 Identify the meaning of words and phrases in short straightforward text
Rt/E3.2a	2. Be able to distinguish the purpose of text	2.1 Identify the purpose of short straightforward text
Rt/E3.1a Rt/E3.6a Rt/E3.7a Rt/E3.8a Rt/E3.9a Rt/E3.3a Rt/E3.5a Rt/E3.5b	3. Be able to find information in text	3.1 Obtain information from short straightforward text
Rw/E3.4a	4. Be able to order words alphabetically	4.1 Use first and second placed letters to order words

5.3 ESB reading assessment reference table

Core Curriculum Reference	Learning Outcomes - <i>The learner will:</i>	Assessment Criteria - <i>The learner can:</i>
Wt/E3.1a Wt/E3.1b Wt/E3.2a Wt/E3.3a Wt/E3.5a Ws/E3.1a Ws/E3.2a Ws/E3.3a Ww/E3.1a	1. Be able to plan text for a given audience	1.1 Plan text for the intended audience
	2. Be able to produce text for a given audience	2.1 Produce content for the intended audience 2.2 Structure main points in short paragraphs 2.3 Sequence text chronologically 2.4 Use grammar correctly 2.5 Use punctuation correctly 2.6 Spell words correctly
	3. Be able to complete a form	3.1 Complete a form with open and closed responses correctly

5.4 ESB writing assessment reference table

Core Curriculum Reference:	Learning Outcomes <i>The learner will:</i>	Assessment Criteria <i>The learner can:</i>	Found in tasks:
Lr/E3. 1a Lr/E3. 1b Lr/E3. 1C Lr/E3.2a Lr/E3.2b Lr/E3.2c Lr/E3.2d Lr/E3.2e Lr/E3 6a L1/E3 6b Lr/E3.7a	1. Be able to obtain information from verbal communication	1.1 Follow the gist of straightforward verbal communication 1.2 Obtain relevant detail from straightforward verbal communication 1.3 Follow straightforward verbal instructions correctly for a given purpose	2, 4 3, 4 3, 4
Sc/E3.1a Sc/E3.1b Sc/E3.4d Sc/E3.4e Sc/E3.4f Sd/E3.1b Sd/E3.1c Sd/E3.1d	2. Be able to speak English to communicate	2.1 Use clear pronunciation to convey intended meaning 2.2 Use appropriate language in context according to formality	1, 2 2, 3
Sc/E3.4c Sc/E3.4d Sc/E3.4e Sc/E3.4c Sc/E3.3a Sc/E3.3b Sc/E3.3c Sc/E3.3d Sc/E3.1b Sc/E3.2a Sd/E3.1b Sd/E3.1g Sd/E3.2a Sd/E3.2b Lr/E3.4a	3. Be able to convey information	3.1 Present information using an appropriate structure for a given purpose 3.2 Provide a verbal account of relevant information for a given audience 3.3 Convey relevant detail during verbal communication	1, 2 1, 2 1, 2
Lr/E3.7c Lr/E3.7d Lr/E3.5a Lr/E3.5b Sd/E3.1a Sd/E3.1b Sd/E3.1e Sd/E3.1g Sd/E3.2a Sd/E3.2b Sd/E3.1c Sd/E3.1d Sd/E3.1f Lr/E3.6b	4. Be able to engage in discussion with others	4.1 Contribute constructively to discussion on straightforward topics 4.2 Express views constructively during verbal communication on straightforward topics 4.3 Plan action with others for a given task 4.4 Obtain relevant information from others	3, 4 2, 4 3, 4 1, 2, 3

5.5 ESB speaking and listening assessment reference table

The assessment criteria listed in the third column of the charts were mapped to the circle roles. If the assessment criteria could not be authentically linked to a role, it was incorporated in post-discussion teacher-led input and follow-up tasks. Those roles with the greatest number of assessment criteria codes on the student-led side of activities indicate where a space potentially exists for greater learner

autonomy in the circle in terms of demonstrating required skills. The blank spaces on this side indicate where students are able to take the circle in unfettered directions free from assessment criteria.

The assessment criteria on the teacher-led side indicate where the circle does not naturally incorporate the type of skills necessary for external exams meaning the teacher will need to provide direct input. Further, for all skills the teacher may identify a need to ‘close the gap’ for learners, as they listen to circle discussions, to support the accurate development of language skills.

The map of roles against assessment criteria is:

Role title	Assessment criteria links					
	Student-led circle work			Teacher-led tasks		
	Reading	Writing	Speaking & Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking & Listening
Discussion Leader	2.1	2.1	2.1 4.3 4.4			1.3
Summariser	1.1 1.2	1.1	1.1 1.2 2.1 3.2 3.3			
Passage Person	3.1	2.2 2.3	2.1 3.1		2.4 3.1	
Word Master	1.4	2.6	2.1	4.1		
Feature Marker	1.3	2.5	2.1 2.2			
Connector			2.1 4.1 4.2 4.3			

5.6 Map of circle roles and assessment criteria

Although a mapping exercise like this is useful for demonstrating to colleagues a teaching and learning value in undertaking the research, it raises a difficulty for me to reconcile assessment criteria with circle discussions. When students speak and listen together, they do not carve up the indicative skills between them, with only the Passage Person speaking in logical order, for example. A conversation is a whole: all speakers and listeners draw on all of their oracy skills in real time. To overcome this dilemma, as the teacher, it was my role to listen carefully to the

discussions and spot those areas where students were having a difficulty and draw this into the controlled follow-up tasks.

In establishing circles, teachers are responsible for providing a range of autonomy support (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004). Organisational support is found in the decisions a teacher makes about room layout, circle members and timings of tasks.

Procedural support is in the types of texts used and helping to maintain class relationships and circle discussions. Cognitive support is by assisting individuals in need and in sharing learning and questions arising from group work.

Cognitive support is where the integrated circle leans towards fluency. Supporting learners tussle with new ideas and thinking frays the edges of controlled activities. The informal circle conversations provide a space for a less restricted way of learning. The AECC itself recognises:

The need for, and degree of, linguistic accuracy will be determined by the purpose of the interaction, e.g. fluency is more important than grammatical accuracy when chatting with friends (DfES, 2001, p.175).

The limits of controlled work and the need for fluency are corroborated with these words, reflecting a different role for the teacher.

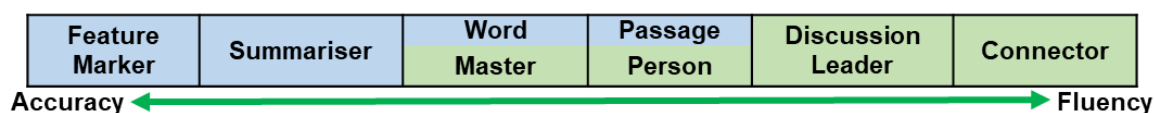
5b. A supporting role for fluency

Circle discussion defines a fluency role for the teacher. To fulfil this role, teachers must be flexible with lesson plans and respond to individual learner needs in the course of lessons, not against a pre-determined timetable of component skills, knowledge and understanding. Language is then a form of personally meaningful communication used naturally in informal conversations.

The integrated circle invites fluency so that defined circle roles are not limited by assessment criteria. The roles open ways for participants to talk about texts and tasks as individuals with different ideas, questions, life experiences and cultural understandings. The teacher is responsible for providing the space where learners speak with their own voice in autonomous wide conversations.

The work of drawing together a set of roles that could work in an integrated circle has led to a new way of looking at the list of roles. Existing explanations of circle roles (Furr, 2009; Gunnery, 2007) provide a linear progression of engaging with a text or task. The roles start with an emphasis on accuracy and move towards making personal connections. Discussion organisation and procedures create a hierarchical structure with learners taking on supervisory roles such as Discussion Leader, Timekeeper and Checker.

The reconfigured integrated circle radiates out from the middle of the list of roles. It should be remembered from Lily's example as Feature Marker in Chapter 4 that the roles are not set. Although some roles are more attuned with accuracy and others with fluency, they are on a sliding scale where the participant's actions direct accuracy and fluency focus. This creates a continuum of accuracy and fluency, so that one is not above the other, but are equally important.



5.7 Accuracy–fluency scale in integrated circle roles

The initial role sheets for the year 2017/18 were drafted with the intention of making the preparatory reading at home task as clear as possible for each circle role. Clear and easy to follow guidance would enable learners to work independently and arrive ready for the circle discussion, especially as lesson time was allocated to working through examples of each role before independent use. However, the takeaway written instructions on the role sheets were insufficient. The danger was to assume that an instruction/exposition-demonstration in whole-class would have equipped all participants at the same time to complete the tasks in the same way in a psychological approach to the circle process.

The reading circle (Furr, 2009) grew out of a monolingual reading-for-grammar-translation HE tradition, the writing circle (Gunnery, 2007) and speaking and listening model (Lipman, 2003) developed in white, western, English speaking education contexts. Introducing circles to ESOL learners from a range of countries, with a range of previous educational experiences meant that the process could disadvantage those who had not had previous opportunities to develop reading

and writing in their first languages. The worry that the circle might exclude participants was raised through the discussion of Burbules (2007) in Chapter 2. Therefore the teacher must understand that the circle process is a long-term activity and be ready to repeat or rephrase instructions multiple times. The role sheet instructions were amended for 2018/19 as an example of how teachers cannot have one set way of presenting information but constantly seek out better explanations or expositions.

Coming to understand the circle process required time for the participants to talk it through together to benefit from each other's experience:

“When I was doing the Connector's role, I didn't know at first what I was writing but Lily explained it to me and I said “I remember now, I remember what the teacher said.” Lily helped me to remember, and because she helped me I helped others because I knew.” [Flower]

Texts are used to initiate circle role completion as the basis of circle discussion. The teacher must carefully choose appropriate texts. It is important to use reading that can throw up unsettled points so that learners can approach it from different perspectives. Texts which include philosophical or moral complications generate the most debate. It is the content that should be complicated, not the language. The texts need to be at a suitable ESOL level or the terrific mental energy needed to comprehend the content might cause participants to lose motivation and give up. If the texts do not ask readers to think deeply about themes, characters or events they could be boring and that may cause participants to lose interest.

Text choice is more than finding material for learners to demonstrate assessed Sfl reading skills but to think and share. Shima pointed out the benefit of a reading a fictional piece about moving house compared to reading a sample Sfl complaint letter about problems in the new home:

“It's where we find the things to talk about. Not the other page. That's just for business. This page is for us - we speak about our experience of houses. Also culture in the house. For my country the husband works but for her [Mata] it's different.” [Shima]

As circle participants talk together, there will be times when conversations falter. The teacher may be required to intervene here to help things move along as highlighted above but there are also times when the teacher should bear with silence and wait before providing answers. It is part of the circle process for participants to provide answers for each other, such as Lily's support for Flower. The accuracy-focused class is accustomed to teacher talk to present language ahead of controlled production and practice. In the fluency-focused class participants have time and space to think for themselves before the teacher intervenes.

The teacher's responsibility to help keep the circle conversation going includes offering a mix of input as a language teacher and as a member of the classroom community. Language input can be of a dialectic nature for accuracy and dialogic for fluency (Sennett, 2012; 2018). They offer space and time to let participants speak freely and collaboratively. This can help to build a group, trust and self-confidence. Teachers also model how to maintain relationships in order for people to get along (Lipman, 2003) and to overcome misunderstandings or breakdowns in communication (Burbules, 2007).

An integrated circle, then, is much more than a method to practise language. It is also about being a member of society. The teacher has to deal with being with others, as much as the students, and can be drawn into being the social mediator at times of disagreement.

From a teacher's point of view, the openness of circle conversations means that the speakers cannot help but reveal something of themselves. This window to inner thoughts, ideas and experiences is a way to gain a sense of students as individuals, rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled with facts and skills.

The role of the teacher in an integrated circle is a balancing act between psychological-accurate and existential-fluent learning. In Chapter 2, I described the teacher's role as one to bookend a circle: to introduce the stimulus and organise the discussion groups; to draw it to a conclusion and extend it via a mini-lesson or follow-up task. I have since realised that view serves organisational and

procedural support but does not do justice to the cognitive work in circles that pushes towards learner autonomy.

The teacher has a complicated role that combines indivisible accuracy and fluency responsibilities. To separate one from the other would create a class tipped towards either the psychological or existential extreme. One supports technical language learning useful in controlled conditions but difficult to apply autonomously in the fluid real-world. The other can produce a group able to freely communicate and understand each other but in ways unintelligible to those outside. The blend of accuracy and fluency is a balanced approach so that language is comprehensible and flexible inside and beyond the classroom.

Part 3: Implications

The integrated circle project has sought to understand what circle conversations are, if circle methods can be integrated and if they can work in an ESOL context. This has revealed how circles lend themselves to supporting learner autonomy at individual and group levels given the right conditions.

The literature review and the trial of an integrated circle method provides insights into the circle as an experience based on organisational autonomy, procedural autonomy and cognitive autonomy (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004) rich with spaces for action, freedom and plurality (Biesta, 2014).

The semi-structured circle design encourages free communication to share connections using language to the best of current ability, without immediate teacher correction unless it is called for. Non-assessed conversation, discussion and dialogue are important for the open exchanges to work, but assessed tasks give clear indications for students on those points they need to improve for exam results. There is a balance between existential and psychological teaching and learning approaches.

The benefits of circles towards learner autonomy are where they enable all participants to be teachers and learners together with the roles, example texts and tasks and discussions providing a scaffold.

Language learning in circles includes becoming sensitive to different perspectives and learning to be together which are all long-term activities. Teachers have to commit time and energy to establish circle techniques and familiarise students with the roles (Gunnery 2007). This can be a challenge when schemes of work are often already crowded.

A major consideration for circles is how different personalities mix together. There can be tensions between people when views are incompatible (Burbules, 2007).

Thinking about circles in the ESOL classroom, invites other teachers to consider how using wide and varied reading, targeted and directed writing for specific purposes, and group discussions to learn about language points and other ways of thinking could be useful in their contexts. This would include collecting a range of suitable resources, using feedback and reflection for assessment, dealing with limited time available for classes, and how circle discussions and extension tasks are timed in lesson planning, how to manage communication breakdowns and how to incorporate student voice and choice in decisions about their learning.

Professional relationships and expectations in places of education can help or hinder efforts to open classrooms up as spaces for learner autonomy. When there is little room for reciprocity, the teacher is at the forefront of perceived success or failure, of bringing the 'right' inputs to achieve the desired outputs for accuracy.

An alternative is to see the classroom as a space where teachers and students can work together to make problem-solving decisions and judgements about what really matters in that classroom. This means that no two circle discussions will be exactly the same as students share their unique experiences and follow their own learning paths for fluency. This can be a risky situation as it is not possible to write an exact lesson plan to follow but it can be a beautiful opportunity to tap into real experiences through the potential of non-linear interactions.

Poppy summarised her integrated circle experience thus:

“Circle lessons are different to how lessons usually look. Usually the teacher talks, students hear and talk a little bit but not too much. The circle was an exchange of views. Everybody can say something about what they think. You can tell a different idea and everybody knows more. At the beginning, it was confusing but when I shared ideas it was better because I understood the job I had to do and I could do it myself.” [Poppy]

Circumstances in educational institutions and classrooms can either support or prevent effective circles. Conditions for circles become the focus of Chapter six and the final conclusions and recommendations from the integrated circle project.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis I introduced dual tensions in the adult ESOL classroom. A tension exists between a demand which comes down from official policy, using ESOL as an instrument for social cohesion and integration, and an effort in the classroom to resist policy restrictions by responding to wider learner needs. I have considered the resulting pressures teachers and students wrestle with using the terms of 'accuracy' and 'fluency'.

Accuracy is the type of ESOL learning tied to assessment criteria, presented within a narrow curriculum and generally based on teacher-led controlled practice to develop the skills needed to pass exams. Exam success allows for progression to further courses and to take up employment to contribute economically to the community. Accuracy entails the correct use of the English language system with communicative competence not only as a student or an employee but as a citizen going about daily tasks such as shopping, making appointments and being neighbourly. It includes correct behaviour to live in line with British Values for social cohesion.

Fluency is the type of ESOL learning that uses wider contexts and free student-directed discussions. Fluency focuses on conversation to communicate meaning and understanding between the speaker and the listener. This is a looser and richer way of using language for effective communication. It includes personal responsibility for managing relationships in order to be with others in democratic ways.

The integrated circle project has drawn my attention to the different concepts of accuracy and fluency in a particular educational setting. The concepts are a straightforward way to label the demands an ESOL teacher has to respond to, and serve as a useful outcome to help other teachers conceptualise what they may find in their classrooms. Other teachers may wish to consider how far towards accuracy, fluency or a balance between the two they want to, or are allowed, to step. Policy directives push education towards accuracy but taking time to think about what type of classroom you and your students believe in will probably

incorporate fluency. The challenges for students and teachers are summed up by the terms 'accuracy' and 'fluency'.

I have found a theoretical way to present the dual tensions through the contrasting work of Stefanou *et al.* (2004) and Biesta (2014). Stefanou *et al.* (2004) enable us to see education as an incremental psychological process which allows for the close monitoring and recording of progress as students are led towards specified outcomes and sanctioned behaviours for work and society. Biesta (2014) offers a view of education where curriculum is flexible and recognises students as individuals with valuable contributions to make to influence their teaching and learning content and relationships which messes with the idea of neat systems.

This is not the way I started thinking about circle pedagogy. It stemmed from an unresolved question in my mind about the role of conversation observed in my previous reading and writing circle trials. By investigating circles more deeply, the circles approach became a practical way to investigate current ESOL pedagogy for adult learners in FE. The work of Furr (2009) and Gunnery (2007) on reading and writing circles respectively inspired the idea of a circle to blend skills, with Lipman (2003) providing a way to think about conversation in circles. I became focused on the question: How does an integrated circle pedagogy impact the classroom experience?

The resulting integrated circle provided a structure for collaborative language tasks: small groups met weekly to discuss and build understandings of a particular text using allocated, rotating roles, before producing their own written work. The roles indicated that circles encouraged a blend of skills accuracy and fluency for self-expression in language learning. Further, the circle dynamic is student-led, offering the potential for group and individual autonomy.

The project has considered the impact of circles and the challenge and opportunities it presents. In the process, five major areas of impact have emerged which can inform the general principles of ESOL teaching and learning. Therefore, this chapter is set out in three parts. Part one considers the conclusions of the integrated circle project. Part two looks at the recommendations to support

accuracy and fluency in the classroom for ESOL learners and potentially for wider contexts. The final part concludes the integrated circle research project.

Part 1: Integrated circle conclusions

Small discussion groups are the heart of the integrated circle. To participate in the discussion a participant first reads a text to generate ideas to share with their group. The circle borrows elements from 'Community of Enquiry' (Lipman, 2003) as reading time is thinking time where personal connections to the stimulus text are made and questions are formed. Sharing connections and questions with the group draws on dialogic interaction (Alexander, 2017) with participants regulating their informal conversations (Sennett, 2018) and coping with communication breakdowns (Burbules, 2007). The informal, student-led discussions are in contrast to traditional teacher-delivered presentations and task instructions. Circle learning makes room for learner autonomy as participants develop language skills accuracy, and learn about each other, with each other.

The integrated circle has tested out a combination of reading, writing, thinking and discussion for ESOL learning. It has pointed to five important factors in circles pedagogy that highlight learner autonomy and the concepts of accuracy and fluency. Observations of circle sessions, participant feedback and data analysis have led to several conclusions regarding circle impacts. The areas of impact are:

1. reciprocity in language learning
2. transforming ideas by sharing experience
3. building the learning community
4. limitations of learner autonomy in circles
5. the role of the teacher

Reciprocity in language learning and transforming ideas by sharing experience

Accuracy is visible in circles when participants comply with the process. They reciprocate by completing circle tasks at the required time and in the 'right' way in order for their peers to be able to participate. The circle cannot exist if learners do

not come prepared or are unwilling to talk, listen and learn from what more competently skilled peers offer.

There is a training process associated with getting learners ready to participate. The teacher explains the circles roles and gives scaffolded practice. Reciprocity is therefore learner(s)-learner(s) but also learner(s)-teacher and teacher-learner(s). The responsibility of the teacher in the circle language learning process is taken up in impact 5: the role of the teacher.

Participating in a circle in an appropriate way can be categorised as organisational and procedural autonomy (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004). However, reciprocal learning can be more open than simply following the rules (Biesta, 2014). It invites collaboration between people who are genuinely interested in their own learning and in helping each other.

In this respect it is difficult to separate language learning and learning about other people and their experiences in the circle. Circle discussions inevitably include personal narratives as participants contextualise the language points they share with text-life links. These two aspects work in conjunction with each other.

Building a learning community

The circle discussion works well when there is agreement, or at least acceptance, between the participants (Burbules, 2007). In accuracy terms, the circle can be seen as a training opportunity to be democratic citizens, for example, to be responsible for own actions such as completing homework, to be tolerant of difference in the group and to respect turn-taking in discussion.

However, real citizenship is not a controlled classroom exercise. It is an experience that needs to be experienced so that people can deal with the real world autonomously. A true life skill is working out who you are as an individual, what to do for yourself when you are faced with an unknown situation, to make independent judgements when you encounter something new, how you choose to (re)act and be with others (Arendt, 1977 cited in Biesta, 2014). A circle experience can be as much about personal identity (Duncan, 2014) as social skills.

Limitations of learner autonomy in circles and the role of the teacher

These two areas of impact are intertwined. It can be hard for learners used to standard SfL experiences to take up the challenge of circle learning. They are required to contribute much of the work to make it a success and to overcome expectations that the teacher is always in charge.

The teacher is in control when it comes to planning circle session content and deadlines, allocating circle groups and providing feedback against set assessment criteria. They also take the lead in allocating circle roles, choosing the texts and tasks and providing support resources such as role note-sheets, dictionaries and pens. Teacher control falls under organisational autonomy support and procedural autonomy support (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004) and is necessary to establish circles in the classroom as part of a psychological training process.

As language beginners, participants' language accuracy will be limited. Language difficulties arising from student discussions provide the basis of the teacher's 'mini-lessons' that follow the circle. It is possible that a language issue may only be a difficulty for one or two students and a quick follow-up exposition (Alexander, 2017) on the spot could resolve it. For example a vocabulary definition, a spelling or pronunciation.

It may be that the sticking point needs more consideration and a teacher would want to think and plan in more depth to assist students develop this area. This could be in the meaning, use and form of a grammatical structure, for example.

It is wise to have a 'mini-lesson' pre-prepared and ready to go. The follow-up lesson should focus on an area of language within the stimulus text as the text gives contextualised examples of the point the teacher will cover in the mini-lesson. The mini-lesson will either serve to draw attention to, clarify, reinforce or extend knowledge of that particular point. The writing task provides an opportunity to use that point.

Although the teacher instigates circles as a classroom strategy, it develops through collaboration with participants. Planned mini-lessons might need to be abandoned if something more pressing emerges on the day.

The teacher is positioned as a beginner being directed by the students to what they need to approach next. Students are involved in starting an ESOL learning action and the teacher is asked to carry it forward in a reversal of normal SfL classroom roles. Collaboration like this turns the circle back to reciprocity in learning.

The impact of the integrated circle research project

Reflecting on the combination of reading, writing, thinking and discussion for ESOL via an integrated circle has offered a chance to think about ESOL pedagogy in new ways. I have thought about circles in light of the teacher's predicament in the classroom to balance the need for language accuracy with the benefits of language fluency.

Analysing and testing out different circle methods has led to the development of an integrated circle pedagogy. Previous circles have treated reading, writing, thinking and discussion as separate elements (Furr, 2009; Gunnery, 2007; Lipman, 2003). The integrated circle takes a holistic approach to language learning.

Previous authors completed their research in different educational contexts with younger age groups and monolingual student groups. The integrated circle project has taken place in a new setting with multilingual adult learners in FE. The time, place and participants have made this particular investigation unique. However, the investigation of the integrated circle has identified five areas of impact for teachers and students that others may recognise.

For students, the circle has extended the principles of dialogic pedagogy (Alexander, 2017). It distinguishes adult learners who, with greater age and in some cases more learning experience, can generally study more autonomously than primary pupils. Thereby the role of independent thinking is recognised as a form of learning interaction visible in the circle approach.

Open circle discussions provide space for fluency in the sense of students finding connections, issues and questions in a text or task they want to talk about. It's an opportunity to find meanings somewhere between the stimuli and the individual

who has the chance to think for themselves, to raise different points of view, to come to agreement or debate disagreement. The students control what is said and how they say it making a circle a language experience using language about experience. Independently chosen conversation topics and use of language offer autonomy from the teacher.

For teachers, the thesis has attempted to translate a detailed psychological-existential (Stefanou *et al.*, 2004; Biesta, 2006; 2014) debate in education to ESOL using the recognisable terms of 'accuracy' and 'fluency'. Describing the teacher's role in terms of balancing accuracy and fluency can help other teachers to make sense of their role and work out how to develop their own practice in ways that make better sense through a description that they might not have had before. The terms can make it possible for other ESOL teachers and teachers in other subject areas to relate the theory and practice of circles to their own everyday classrooms. They may also wish to consider some recommendations that have arisen from the project data.

Part 2: Integrated circle recommendations

Recommendations for accuracy

Language skills

Results from focus group feedback, participant self-assessment and mock results indicate ESOL language learners would benefit from a greater focus on teacher-controlled written and spoken grammar activities. For writing, it would help students beginning to use the Roman alphabet to have phonic-spelling support.

For speaking, it would be useful to record and play back examples of participants speaking to capture examples of grammar in use if possible. The recordings would be a way to share examples of language used accurately and where improvements are required.

It is also important to build regular opportunities for students to plan, draft, give and listen to assessed oral presentations and to ask and answer questions about them. This was missing from the integrated project where conversation was about

rich informal communication. However, controlled practice is a way to achieve the type of accuracy needed for exams.

Authentic listening materials are also a useful way to help prepare students for the final exams. Graded audios can be spoken with unnatural care which makes it difficult to prepare for the pace of the ESB/Ascentis recordings.

Controlled accuracy practise helps students to understand how they can pass exams if they understand the assessment criteria and can monitor their own achievement on a regular basis. For example, I added an ESB/Ascentis assessment criteria section to all the ESOL worksheets I issued. Completed work was marked against the criteria with written comments to highlight successes and areas for improvement. I recommend incorporating explicit assessment criteria in all modes and as many activities as feasible.

Circle roles and note-sheets

In order for participants to comprehend the circle process, introduce the circle roles in whole class before allocating individual roles. It takes time for participants to become familiar with the process. The teacher needs to commit several sessions to explaining, demonstrating and helping learners complete their roles before they can complete these independently.

Once a student has tried a role and feels confident with it, they are in a good position to explain it to their peers. Students are valuable peer teachers in the circle process.

Roles are endlessly adaptable. All manner of roles can be devised for different subject areas. However, I recommend that the link between the roles and the topic is made explicit so that relevance to learning is clear. The immediately obvious role-learning link for integrated circles was made with the ESB/Ascentis assessment criteria without being bound by it. The roles provided scope for learning to be with others in participatory ways and for developing self-confidence. There may be other options open to other subject areas depending on the desired final outcome.

It is important that role instructions can be followed autonomously if tasks are to be completed outside of class. However, just writing simple steps to follow may not be enough. Participants are likely to need time to practise making role notes with support and guidance from the teacher and knowledgeable peers.

Initial texts and tasks

The integrated circle was a new type of classroom experience for the ESOL learners who participated in this project. At the same time, they were beginner language learners. In order to limit the cognitive effort to learn a new process at the same time as new language, I recommend starting circles with the type of texts, tasks and assessment criteria the learners are most familiar with.

It is also useful to start with topics learners are familiar with. This might mean looking at standard SfL materials as a source of recognisable content. However, as the integrated circle is driven by students sharing their own experiences it is advisable to look beyond SfL for other texts with universal themes. Texts, including those from language course books that appear ready-made, may need adapting by the teacher to be appropriate.

Recommendations for fluency

Further texts and tasks

The majority of ESOL learning material comes from resources specifically written for 'exchanges connected with education, training, work and social roles' (DfES, 2001, p.177). I recommend increasing the use of fiction and authentic texts where learners can use imagination, connect and question the characters and themes that run much deeper than transactional SfL texts.

The quality of discussion and thinking generated by texts with common, central and contestable themes (Lipman, 2003) is likely to be richer. Discussions are framed by a shared issue or an important question for which there is more than one valid point of view. What is common for some, may be contestable to others.

Once you start looking for suitable material outside of traditional sources, you can find it almost anywhere: stories, poems, songs, graphic novels, local newspapers, magazines, leaflets, adverts, letters, postcards and more increasingly electronic

and online sources. Libraries at places of education are a mine of texts. I recommend speaking with your subject librarian for guidance on suitable resources. One early outcome from previous reading circles at my institution was for all the graded readers to be shelved by level rather than just alphabetically by author. Each level has been given a colour-coded mark on the spine so that learners can autonomously choose books. This was extended after integrated circles so that topics on the SfL ESOL schemes of work have been matched to other subject-area resources. ESOL teachers have knowledge of a wider range of material to support lesson planning and ESOL students have more options for autonomous reading and learning. Other subject teachers have knowledge of resources suitable to support ESOL learners in their groups.

Learner voice

A circle approach aims to respond to learners depending on their needs, rather than slavishly following a scheme of work. As a result the circle scheme of work is never finished. It is always adapting following student feedback. For example, participant feedback in 2017/18 informed the use of more audios in 2018/19.

In light of this, I recommend as a teacher to always keep copies of stimuli. They might be useful for a future iteration and will help you save time searching for them all over again. Any mini-lessons or writing tasks informed by the original use of the stimulus can be amended for new groups of students.

Participant feedback has helped to think about how to organise circle groups differently in the next iteration so that students who have not completed the at-home preparatory tasks will work together in a 'catch up' circle. This might address the dissatisfaction in those who do come prepared and are ready to start their circle conversation. A circle handbook has been drafted for self-reference following participant evaluations.

Self-reflective diaries are a helpful tool for regular on-going feedback. They are most meaningful if the points students are asked to reflect on are clearly relevant to their own learning, much like the issue raised for circle roles and note-sheets above. Therefore, I recommend inviting the learners to choose their own set of reflective questions to think about their own learning needs (Clarke, 2001), that

can be about SfL AECC (DfES, 2001) references but can be so much more through the reading, thinking, discussing and sharing of ideas that comes from the circle.

Part 3: Closing the circle

Limitations of the integrated circle project

This project focused on adult ESOL students' views of a circle learning experience in FE and what students and teachers could learn from this. The project built on my previous preliminary studies and findings have been shared with the participants, the ESOL team, college departments, the ETF / SUNCETT Customised MPhil/PhD community and at ETF conferences.

However, the project was limited by virtue of being small-scale. The participants were drawn from one teacher, at one institution, from one subject, at one level. Therefore, this research has focused on a specific situation and the SfL setting limited the range and number of text types, tasks and circle framework options (diagram 2.15) considered. A wider and longer investigation would have allowed for greater breadth and depth in exploring the role of conversation in teaching and learning.

A deeper investigation was hampered by my being a full-time teacher without remission to develop the project. The interest that managers and other teachers have in it will limit the immediate impact of circles and future iterations at this institution. It takes time to implement change.

Within the project, collecting field notes was problematic given that circles are ideally made with six students to stimulate an interaction that draws on all of the roles. I had more than six students in the class so there were always two circles running at the same time. It was not possible to hear and see everyone so I followed the group with the most number of students in it each week and made a record of as much as I could. This was a pragmatic decision to reflect a circle in the best way I could in the circumstances I had.

As an action research project, the focus was on a particular setting and particular participants. The specific nature of investigating a personal workplace issue with my own students means that I have not acted just as an observer but I have been involved in my own research which raises issues of my insider's objectivity. The participants know me as their teacher and perhaps this effected their objectivity.

I sought to offset this by collecting data from a range of sources to improve its reliability. I attempted to put aside my own prior knowledge and experience of ESOL at this institution by reflecting on the circles in front of me and reporting back my reflections to the participants for appraisal. I attempted to minimise their potential bias by speaking with a number of ESOL students each with different ESOL experience and expectations and collecting the range of circle documents to identify the core impacts of the method. Another researcher may have detected alternative impacts. They may also have selected a different research plan.

To help encourage honesty, anonymity was preserved with student-chosen pseudonyms. To clarify my teacher-researcher role, I used research tutorials to clarify my role, the purpose of my research, which data would be collected and how it would be used and how their participation would help.

However, I will never be entirely certain if the details the participants gave me were not filtered in some way. Being second or other language learners, their English skills may have impeded their explanations and descriptions. Indeed, their understandings of the circle experience, and mine, will be more complex than our words will ever be able to convey (Schön, 1991, p.276). These limitations mean that this study cannot be generalised but aims for relatability through an illustration that may be recognisable to others.

Future of circles

The messages above have come from the classroom and are relevant to teachers trying out an integrated circle with their own students. However, teachers are limited by the policies in place in their institutions as influenced and constrained by the local context and national priorities for education, particularly to do with the economy and skills for employment. But I am reminded of the professional responsibility teachers have to participate in the debates that affect ESOL teaching

and learning and a role to improve practice (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; McNiff 2014; Peutrell, 2015). One personal outcome of the circle investigation has been to empower myself with a deeper knowledge of the history and context of ESOL and a sharper awareness of how this impacts the classroom. I feel more confident in my voice to speak up for my profession and ESOL students, such as sharing this research in the peer-reviewed ESOL journal *Language Issues* (Peters, 2020). Therefore, there are some recommendations that managers might like to consider in order for the integrated circle to become a feature of future provision.

The quantitative data from this project has shown that circles can have some success when sufficient time is given to focus on particular skills, such as the improvements in reading in both project years and writing in 18/19. This might suggest keeping a separate suite of circles rather than an integrated model. Separate circles would suit the psychological-accuracy arm of education. Yet, language is not used in isolation. It is part of a complicated web of thinking, being and doing. This particular project may not have been universally successful in terms of accuracy but it has illuminated another way of approaching education through existential-fluency not so focused on micro-level skills.

The integrated circle is opening opportunities to rethink the narrow curriculum and limited provision. Plans are underway to extend the reach of my research to offer circles as a non-accredited course from 2021/22 to introduce new ESOL students to college life, to make friends and to start engaging with texts for language learning. The GCSE English and the Functional Skills departments are also interested in adopting circles methods with their students.

For students enrolled on SfL courses, time is a precious commodity for teaching and learning and the overwhelming evaluation from participants is to have more than one 3-hour class per week. One option might be to organise extra-curricular student conversation clubs such as the philosophical discussion groups promoted by SAPERE to extend dialogic activity.

Broadening opportunities for adult learners within college would not only be a way to build on the momentum of circles but to evidence a response to the Education Inspection Framework (2019). The focus of Ofsted inspections is moving away

from leadership and management, data and outputs towards a curriculum-centred view of the whole learner and learning experience.

Summary

The integrated circle project began life as an investigation into a teaching and learning method for adult ESOL learners in FE. It moved out of the classroom into a consideration of different models of conversation and theories of learning, before coming back to circle events in a college. The examples provided by participants gave an insight into how learner conversations in an integrated circle process can support collaborative language learning and learning about other lives and experiences.

The process starts with a reading text to prompt ideas to bring to the circle discussion. 'Read like a butterfly' implies that a wide range of texts should be used. Reading about all manner of characters and adventures and reacting to them is for fluency. Reading for gist and detailed information, for vocabulary and grammar structures is for accuracy. Both concepts feed in to the transformative effect language learning can have on future opportunities in life.

'Write like a bee' relates to accurate writing for specific purposes as demand by SfL tasks. It also relates more generally in circles to undertaking specific roles for the benefit of the group and of working co-operatively.

'Discuss' indicates the conversation that takes place in the integrated circle which bring reading, thinking, writing and relationships together. Discussion is a space for autonomous conversations to learn about language and other ways of thinking with a circle group.

The integrated circle is an everyday classroom method for language learning with psychological training methods and informal conversation. A circle can work with only one of these aspects. From reading circles, it is possible for the method to be about the fluency experience when 'A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room' (Furr, 2009, p.6). From writing circles, the method can centre on matters of correctness (Gunnery, 2007). It was not possible for this project to avoid accuracy

being in a SfL context. The issue of fluency emerged through learner conversations in circles as significant for learner autonomy.

This thesis has set out different ways to consider learner autonomy by investigating the role of conversation in integrated circle methods. A useful summary of the main distinguishing features is found in Biesta's (2014) comments on the types of communication that can take place in a classroom. Communication can be 'a mechanical "go-between" for the "safe" transportation of bits of information from one location to another'. It can also be 'a process in which meaning is made and shared...as an encounter between subjects, not an exchange between objects' (ibid., p.35).

Practical examples have been taken from a working integrated circle classroom. An emerging circle effect is autonomy in classroom communities in which learners may pool language knowledge, life experiences and individual perspectives at word, sentence, text and cross-cultural levels via conversation. The role of conversation needs to be tempered with critical dimensions where the idea of dialogue can be challenged. Underlying themes of relationship-building and democracy in ESOL are emerging with circles beginning to appear as autonomous learning spaces.

Teachers may like to reflect on how they can navigate between providing enough guidance to allow for key required language learning and enough space to allow for learner autonomy, without moving too far to either extreme. A route may be provided by balancing organisational, procedural and cognitive support based on an open communication-centred approach that sees teaching and learning as a democratic act between all participants. Conversation is a way for students to learn together and about each other in their discussion groups, as individuals and with teacher assistance. For circles, this can result in individuals learning language skills, developing new perspectives through the sharing of life experiences and of managing class relationships through group discussions.

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to take part or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully.

Study Title

Read like a butterfly, write like a bee – Discuss

What is the purpose of the study?

- The aim of the study is to research further how circles methods can help adult ESOL students.
- This research is part of my ETF/SUNCETT Customised MPhil degree programme at the University of Sunderland.

Why have I been approached?

- You are aged over 19 years
- You are an ESOL student this year, learning with me.

Do I have to take part?

- You **do not** have to take part. It is **voluntary**.
- If you are happy to take part, please complete the **consent form** and return it to me.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

- You can stop taking part in the project at any time.
- You do not have to say why
- Your class will continue as normal.
- Please let me know if you want to stop taking part in the project.
- All data collected up to the point of withdrawal will be immediately destroyed.

What will happen to me if I take part?

- You will be asked to complete a **consent form** to show you are willing to take part in the study and that you understand what you are required to do.
- You will then be asked to complete a questionnaire about learning English.
- You will take part in circle activities at college in your normal college times each week.
- I would like to work with you as a group and record some individual comments and examples of work.
- All findings will be checked and amended with you.
- There will be no costs or payments made.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no anticipated disadvantages of taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Your participation will help increase knowledge in ESOL teaching and learning.

What if something goes wrong?

If you are unhappy with the conduct of this study please contact:

- The researcher - Sarah Peters

- The supervisor - Dr Lawrence Nixon
- The Chair of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group - Dr John Fulton.

How will my information be kept confidential?

- All participant information (data) will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act (1998).
- The data collected will be completed questionnaires, examples of work and transcripts of audio-/visual-recordings.
- Your data will be **anonymous**. It will not be linked to your real name.
- All data will be stored **securely**. Paperwork will be kept in a **secure** folder in the ESOL **staffroom** and electronic documents on a **password protected computer**.
- Completely anonymised data **may be shared** with other researchers and/or **used** for teaching purposes.
- The data **may be looked at** by staff authorised by the University of Sunderland for audit and quality assurance purposes.

Who is organising and funding the research?

- The research is organised by Sarah Peters, who is an ESOL Lecturer at Hull College.
- The project is externally funded by the Education and Training Foundation.

Who as reviewed the study?

The study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group.

Further Information and contact details

- Researcher – Sarah Peters
Email: Sarah.Peters@research.sunderland.ac.uk
Phone: 01482 598 729
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Email: lawrence.nixon@sunderland.ac.uk
Phone: 0191 515 2525
- Chair of the University of Sunderland Research Ethics Group – Dr John Fulton
Email: john.fulton@sunderland.ac.uk
Phone: 0191 515 2529

Thank you for taking time to read the information sheet!

Appendix B: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Study title: Read like a butterfly, write like a bee - Discuss

I confirm that I am over the age of 19 years.

Please initial
box

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Please initial
box

Yes No

I agree to interview / focus group / consultation being audio recorded.

I agree to interview / focus group / consultation being video recorded.

I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be shared (after it has been anonymised) with other researchers.

I agree that my data gathered in this study may be shared (after it has been anonymised) to be used for teaching purposes.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix C: Data Collection Forms

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

ESOL Entry 3 ESB Reading Self-Assessment

- Complete columns A and B using the scores in the table below.

A Importance to me:	B My Ability:
5 = Essential 4 = Very important 3 = Important 2 = Slightly important 1 = Not important	5 = I can do this unaided. 4 = I can do this alone but I need to use a dictionary / textbook. 3 = I can do this with help from a friend. 2 = I can only do this with help from my tutor. 1 = I can't do this at all.

Skill	Code	A Importance to me (5 – 1)	B My Ability 1 (5 – 1)	C My Ability 2 (5 – 1)
Identify the main points in a text.	1.1			
Identify the main events in a text.	1.2			
Use language features to work out meaning e.g. punctuation, bullet points, numbers.	1.3			
Understand words and phrases.	1.4			
Understand the purpose of a text.	2.1			
Get information from a text or picture.	3.1			
Use 1st and 2nd letters to find and put words in alphabetical order.	4.1			

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

ESOL Entry 3

ESB Writing Self-Assessment

- Complete columns A and B using the scores in the table below.

A Importance to me:	B My Ability:
5 = Essential 4 = Very important 3 = Important 2 = Slightly important 1 = Not important	5 = I can do this unaided. 4 = I can do this alone but I need to use a dictionary / textbook. 3 = I can do this with help from a friend. 2 = I can only do this with help from my tutor. 1 = I can't do this at all.

		A	B	C
Skill	Code	Importance to me (5 – 1)	My Ability 1 (5 – 1)	My Ability 2 (5 – 1)
Planning				
Write a relevant plan	1.1			
Content				
Use correct layout	2.1			
Use appropriate register e.g. informal or formal.				
Include all information to answer the question.				
Paragraphs				
Write at least 2 paragraphs	2.2			
Chronological Order				
Organise writing in a logical order e.g. and, but, so, because last, this, next In the past, Now, In the future Firstly, Secondly, My next point is...	2.3			
Grammar				
Write 4 sentences correctly e.g. correct subject-verb agreement	2.4			
Use past, present and future tenses e.g. simple, continuous				
Punctuation				
Use capital letters e.g. to begin sentences, for 'I', for proper nouns	2.5			
Use full stop(.), question mark (?) and exclamation (!) mark correctly				
Spelling				
Use correct vocabulary / spell topic words correctly	2.6			
Forms				
Write personal details in the correct position on a form.	3.1			

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

ESOL Entry 3
ESB Speaking and Listening Self-Assessment

- Complete columns A and B using the scores in the table below.

A Importance to me:	B My Ability:
5 = Essential 4 = Very important 3 = Important 2 = Slightly important 1 = Not important	5 = I can do this unaided. 4 = I can do this alone but I need to use a dictionary / textbook. 3 = I can do this with help from a friend. 2 = I can only do this with help from my tutor. 1 = I can't do this at all.

		A	B	C
Skill	Code	Importance to me (5 – 1)	My Ability 1 (5 – 1)	My Ability 2 (5 – 1)
Listening				
Understand the main topic.	1.1			
Understand detailed information.	1.2			
Follow instructions	1.3			
Speaking				
Speak with good pronunciation.	2.1			
Use correct words.	2.2			
Give information.	3.1			
Talk for different purposes.	3.2			
Give details	3.3			
Join in a discussion.	4.1			
Give your views.	4.2			
Plan actions with a partner.	4.3			
Ask questions.	4.4			

Name: _____ Group: _____ Date: _____

Questions about Learning English

1. What do you enjoy about learning English?
What makes it good? What helps you to learn?

Reading

Writing

Speaking and Listening

2. What do you not enjoy about learning English?
What makes it bad? What stops you learning?

Reading

Writing

Speaking and Listening

3. How do teachers help you with learning English?
How could teachers be more helpful?

4. What kind of things do you learn from your friends about learning English?
How important is this 'informal learning' to you?

5. What kind of feedback or comments do you learn best from? Tick (✓)

The teacher / my friend tells me what I good at and what I need to practise.

The teacher / my friend corrects my mistakes.

The teacher / my friend writes messages on my work.

Other...

6. Do you try to learn something you find difficult?

Are you happy to try new ways of learning?

7. What could you do to improve your English generally?

8. Which is the most important English skills to improve?

What will you do to improve it?


9. How will you check your English skills are improving?

Appendix D: Entry 3 Assessment Criteria

Reading	Writing	Speaking and Listening
R1.1 Identify the main points in a text.	W1.1 Write a relevant plan.	L1.1 Understand the main topic.
R1.2 Identify the main events in a text.	W2.1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use correct layout. • Use formal or informal. • Include all information to answer the task. 	L1.2 Understand detailed information.
		L1.3 Follow instructions.
R1.3 Use language features to work out meaning, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • punctuation • bullet points • numbers 	W2.2 Write at least 2 paragraphs.	S2.1 Speak with good pronunciation.
	W2.3 Write in a logical order, e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • and, but, so, because • last, this, next • In the past, Now, In the future Firstly, Secondly, My next point is...	S2.2 Use correct words.
R1.4 Understand words and phrases.		S3.1 Give information.
R2.1 Understand the purpose of a text.	W2.4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write 4 sentences with correct grammar. • Use past, present and future. 	S3.2 Talk for different purposes e.g. informal, formal.
R3.1 Get information from a text or picture.		
R4.1 Use 1st and 2nd letters to find and put words in alphabetical order.	W2.5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use capital letters correctly. • Use full stop (.), question mark (?) and exclamation (!) mark correctly. 	S3.3 Give details.
	W2.6 Use correct vocabulary / spell topic words correctly.	S4.1 Join in a discussion.
	W3.1 Write personal details in the correct position on a form.	S4.2 Give your views.
		S4.3 Plan actions with a partner.
		S4.4 Ask questions.

Appendix E: Role Sheets

Adapted from Furr, M. (2009) and Gunnery, S. (2007).

 <h3>Discussion Leader</h3>	Text: _____
<p>Your role has two parts:</p> <p>1. You First, read or listen to the text. Find the key theme, topic and ideas in the text. Write one question for each of the other roles. Complete the notes below.</p> <p>2. Circle Start the discussion by explaining the theme, topic and ideas in the text. Explain why you think that is important. Ask your questions. Make sure everyone joins in the discussion. Ask each member to present their information. Keep the discussion going!</p>	

- **What is the theme, topic or main idea in the text?**

- **My questions for other members in my Circle.**

Questions can be about:

what you think or feel about the text, things you don't understand

opinions about the characters, the theme, the ending or what could happen next in the text

your own ideas for questions about the text

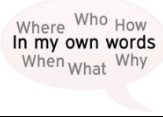
1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____



Summariser

Text:

Your role has two parts:

1. You

First, read or listen to the text.

Find the key points of text. These are the things everyone must know to understand the text.

Complete the notes below.

2. Circle

Use your notes to tell your group a short summary of the text.

Explain why they are important to understand the text.

Ask your Circle what they think are the key points.

▪ **What is the text type?**

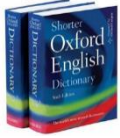
▪ **Is it formal or informal?**

▪ **What are the key points?**

1. **Who are the main characters?**

2. **What are the main events?**

3. **My Summary**



Word Master

Text:

Your role has two parts:

3. You

First, read or listen to the text.

Find 5 key words or phrases that you think are important for this text.

Complete the notes below.

4. Circle

Tell your group the words or phrases you found.

Explain what they mean.

Explain why you think they are important for the text.

- **Choose five useful / important words or phrases from the text.**

	Word / Phrase	Meaning	Why I chose it
1.	Page: _____ Para: Line: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
2.	Page: _____ Para: Line: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
3.	Page: _____ Para: Line: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
4.	Page: _____ Para: Line: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
5.	Page: _____ Para: Line: _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____



Feature Marker

Text:

Your role has two parts:

1. You

First, read or listen to the text.

Find the most important language features and punctuation marks.

Examples: a special layout, headings, images, captions, symbols, charts, lists, etc.

words in **bold**, *italics* or underlined, etc.

full stops, capital letters, commas, apostrophes, exclamation marks, question marks, speech marks, etc.

Complete the notes below.

2. Circle

Tell your group the language features and punctuation marks you found.

Explain why they are used.

Explain why you think they are important for the text.

- Choose up to five language features and punctuation marks from the text.

Features / Marks	Use	Why I chose it
1. Page: _____ Para: _____ Line: _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
2. Page: _____ Para: _____ Line: _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
3. Page: _____ Para: _____ Line: _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
4. Page: _____ Para: _____ Line: _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
5. Page: _____ Para: _____ Line: _____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____



Passage Person

Text:

Your role has two parts:

1. You

Read or listen to the Text.

Find important, difficult or interesting paragraphs or sections.

Make notes about the paragraphs:

- The order of the paragraphs
- Useful phrases to help order the paragraphs
- Important information about the topic, characters or events and actions
- Any other points you think are important about the paragraphs which help you understand the Text.

2. Circle

Read the key paragraphs to the group.

Ask the group one or two questions about each paragraph.

My paragraphs:

Page _____ Paragraph _____

Reasons for choosing the paragraph

Questions about the paragraph

Page _____ Paragraph _____

Reasons for choosing the paragraph

Questions about the paragraph

Page _____ Paragraph _____

Reasons for choosing the paragraph

Questions about the paragraph



Connector

Text:

Your role has two parts:

1. You

Read or listen to the text.

Look for connections between the text and life:

- daily experiences and routines
- your culture and traditions

Look for similarities and differences.

2. Circle

Tell the group about the connections.

Ask for questions or comments.

Ask the group if they can think of any other connections.

My connections: Think about:

Themes: What is the topic of this Text? Is this an important subject in your country? Do people think the same way, or differently, in your culture?

Events: Things which have happened to you, family or friends; heard on the radio or TV; read in books, magazines, newspapers, on the internet, etc. Do these things happen in your culture?

Characters: Do the people in the Text remind you of people you know? Do you understand their thoughts and feelings or actions? If so, why? Do the people in the Text behave in the same way as people in your culture / the whole world?

My connections

My questions

Appendix F: Samples of data

Self-Assessments

Questions about learning English

ESOL Entry 3 Academic Reading Self-Assessment

ESOL Entry 3 Academic Writing Self-Assessment

ESOL Entry 3 Speaking and Listening Self-Assessment

Questions about Learning English

1. What do you enjoy about learning English? What makes it good? What helps you to learn?
 Reading Writing Speaking and Listening
I reading good but I found some mistakes. I need reading in my classroom.

2. What do you not enjoy about learning English? What makes it bad? What stops you learning?
 Reading Writing Speaking and Listening
I need some spelling to help me for writing and the teacher tell me which mistakes.

3. How do teachers help you with learning English? How could teachers be more helpful?
I give me more home work. I give me every Monday books to reading and summarize this book.

4. What kind of things do you learn from your friends about learning English? How important is this informal learning to you?
Reading and writing to help me for my job and my life.

Mock exams 1

ESOL Mock Exam Attendance and Results E3 Reading

ESOL Mock Exam Attendance and Results E3 Writing

ESOL Mock Exam Attendance and Results E3 Speaking & Listening

Role sheets

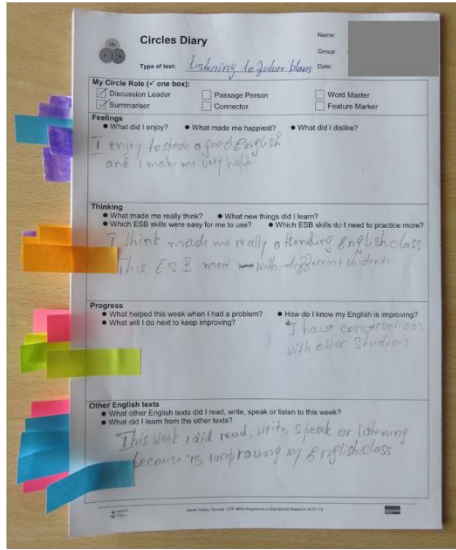
Word Master

Text: Dick Whittington

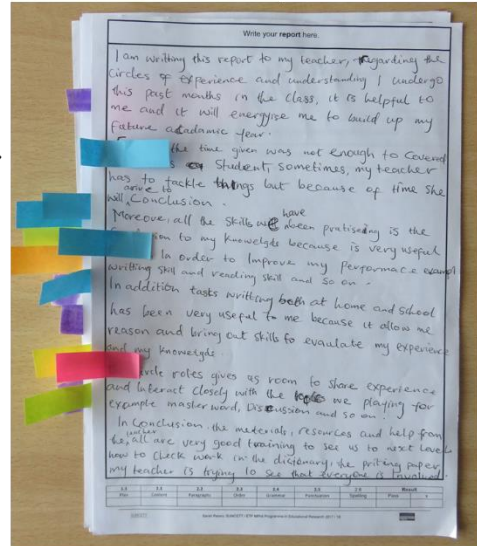
1. Find five useful / important words or phrases from the text.

Page	Phrase	Meaning	Why I chose it
1	a road or path	is one of the reasons why he was successful	
2	businessman	because it is his job which he knew to help his fortune	
3	come back Dick Whittington	This sentence is the beginning of the next sentence	
4	he knew how to spend his money	he is wise and in his wisdom a fortune	
5	three times he is mayor of the same city	that he is a hard, wise and desirable person	

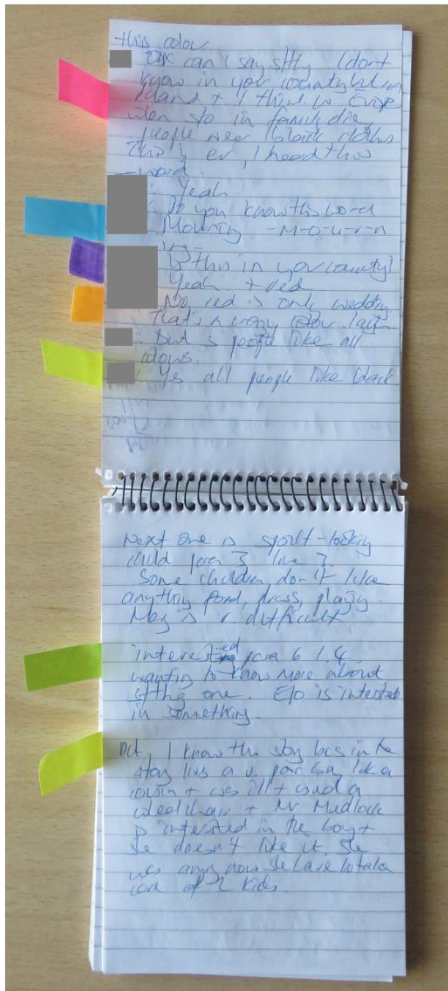
Students' diaries



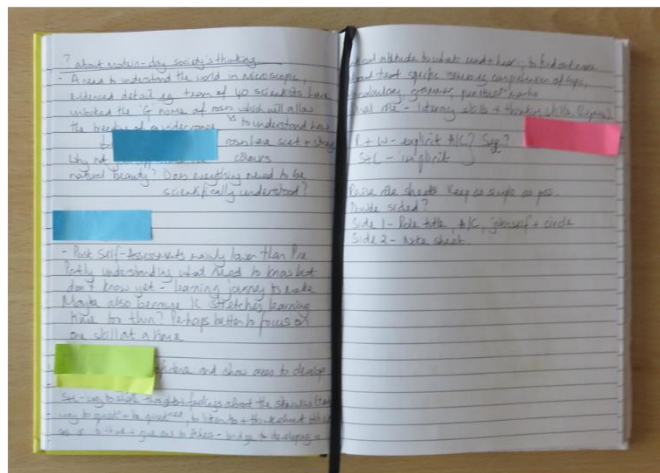
Students' evaluations



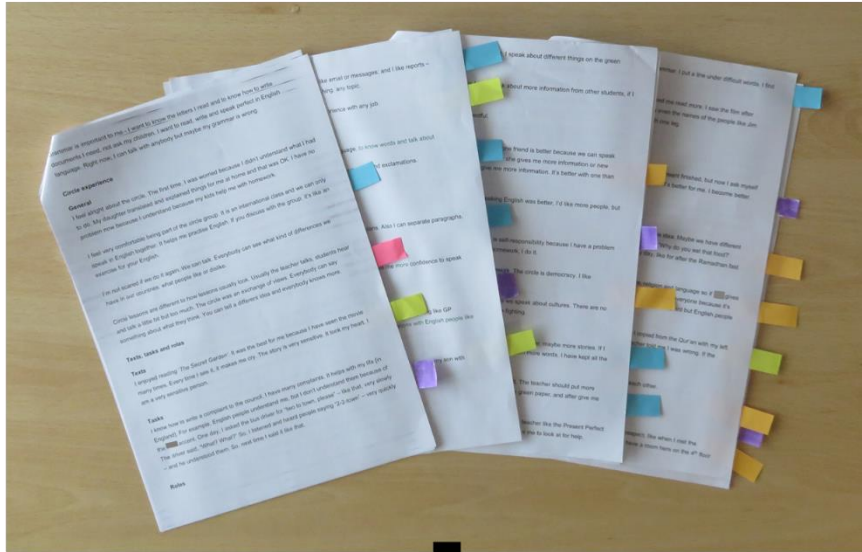
Field notes



Reflective notebook



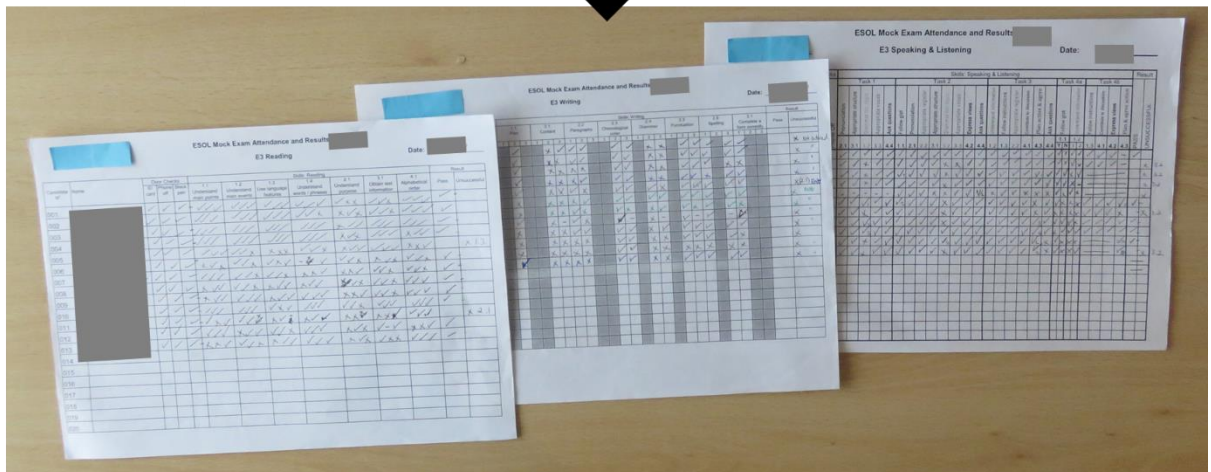
Interview transcripts



Video transcript

Row ID	Time	Speaker	Content	Notes	Outcome
77	00.08.14 - 00.08.30	Flower	OK. Look the page one, paragraph one, line seven, page one, paragraph one, line seven. Ah, I choose the word 'briefcos'.	Mispronunciation	Accuracy
78	00.08.30	Rose	Briefcase	Models correct pronunciation	Knowledge
79	00.08.31	Poppy	Ah, OK. Briefcase	Signals comprehension	Accuracy
80	00.08.32	Daisy	Briefcase	Echoes pronunciation. Nods - understands	Accuracy
81	00.08.33	Lily	Briefcase	Echoes pronunciation. Low intonation - understands.	Accuracy
82	00.08.34 - 00.08.44	Flower	Briefcase. The meaning of this word used for carrying papers. Ah, especially when you, when you go to work, you put it in.	Corrects own pronunciation; mimes papers in a briefcase. Poppy nods	Individual Accuracy
83	00.08.45 - 00.08.46	Rose	Mmm. Carrying some papers.	Defines use of briefcase	Knowledge
84	00.08.47	Lily	Important...important	Gives a reason for using a briefcase	Accuracy
85	00.08.48	Flower	Yes, you go to work.	Emphasises context	Connection
86	00.08.49	Farima	Documents.	Emphasises contents of briefcase	Connection
87	00.08.50 - 00.08.58	Flower	Yeah, important for the job and for the work. And you keep the papers well.	Repeats context & use	Connection
88	00.08.58	Farima	I think it's something like same as bag.	Connects to other known vocabulary	Knowledge
89	00.09.00	Flower	Yes, same of bag.	Confirms accuracy of Farima's understanding	Accuracy
90	00.09.04	Rose	The office document	Builds on understanding	Knowledge
91	00.09.07 - 00.09.12	Flower	The small one and especially for the, yes, for the important office paper for the work.	Builds on understanding	Knowledge
92	00.09.12	Rose	OK	Confirms own understanding	Accuracy
93	00.09.13 - 00.09.26	Flower	Why I choose this, er, because this is better to me to keep my things, er, like paper like certificates or works paper so important for me to keep it well.	To justify choice - personal connection	Fluency
94	00.09.27	Rose	Keep them safe in the briefcase.	Repeats use	Fluency
95	00.09.30	Flower	Yes, keep them safe in the briefcase.	Repeats use	Fluency
96	00.09.32	Farima	Yes	Confirms own understanding / agreement	Fluency
97	00.09.33	Lily	Er, maybe lock, it has lock, key, key	Connects to own knowledge of keeping	Fluency

Mock exams 2



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