Participation, Interaction and Emergence:

A Responsive Curriculum in ESOL

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Abstract

The curriculum process in ESOL in the UK follows a well-worn performative journey, emphasising outcomes and assessment as measurable products of learning, rather than the learners or the learning processes. I suggest that this does not reflect the reality of how ESOL learners learn language, and that many of the acquisition processes (interlanguage, uptake) are often unpredictable, and lead to false impressions of progress which fails to benefit students. This research explored an alternative model of course design, drawing on processes linked to critical pedagogy, rejecting formal pre-planned learning objectives in favour of emergent language (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009; Chinn & Norrington-Davies, 2023). Other research explores how these approaches can be used in a limited way (Gallen, 2014; Chinn & Norrington Davies, 2023) or where the researchers are relatively independent (e.g. Cooke et al, 2023; Auerbach, 1992; Morgan, 1998). A large further education college presented barriers to this with extensive audit systems based on an outcomes-led curriculum model.

The curriculum process which developed emphasised **participation** of the students; **interaction** between students, text, teacher and the social context of learning; and **emergence** of language at the point of need, rather than educated guesswork of traditional learning objectives.

This led to an extensive emergent curriculum, introducing a wide range of lexical and grammatical forms. Structured lessons, without traditional language objectives, were still needed although lessons also emerged in the moment. Barriers included backwash from ESOL exams and qualifications other than ESOL introduced to improve funding, although this was less extensive than expected. The approach could be challenging. but student feedback was positive on the course and the course content. Teacher control over course and curriculum remained and was expected by students; the role became curatorial – identifying affordances and working with those. This research proposes that this model can work well in a restrictive, audit-heavy environment developing a strategy which other teachers could use in this and other contexts.

Key Words: emergent language, participatory, ESOL, learning journey

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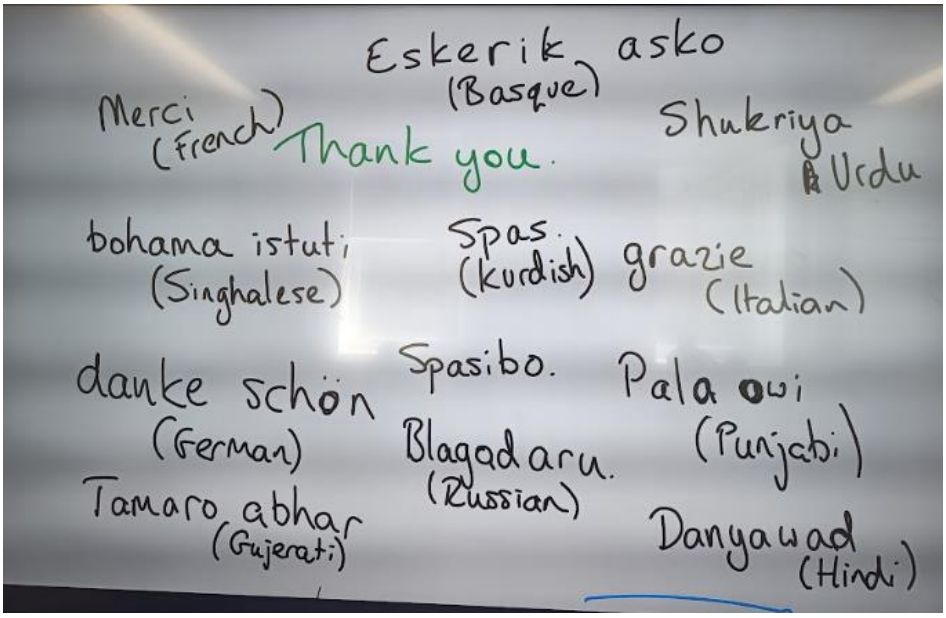

A Note on Publication & Plagiarism

Some elements of this thesis, in particular chapters 1, 6 & 7, formed parts of articles published during the research process, mainly in the following articles:

- Shepherd, S. 2022. 'What did Skills for Life ever do for us?' Language Issues: The ESOL Journal, Volume 33, Number 2, Winter 2022, pp. 27-40(14)
- Shepherd, S. 2023a. ‘A Break with Tradition: a responsive, emergent curriculum.’ ESOL Matters: the Newsletter of the IATEFL ESOL Special Interest Group. March 2023.
- Shepherd, S. 2023b. ‘An Emergent Curriculum for ESOL: concepts, tools & challenges’ Language Issues: The ESOL Journal. Volume 34, Number 2, Winter 2023, pp. 29-40 (12)

Some elements of this thesis, in particular the teacher refection data, have also been published freely online through my blog, which can be seen online at http://samuelshep.wordpress.com

This has been noted in the text where possible, but it remains plausible that some elements may have been overlooked.

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Chapter 1 – The Trouble with ESOL: Curriculum, Assessment and Learner Centredness

> People start out believing in the god and end up believing in the structure.
>
> Terry Pratchett, Small Gods.

Roots - an introduction

2006. I am sitting in a seminar room at the University of Leeds. It is the heyday of Skills for Life ESOL – funding is plentiful for teaching, for teacher training and for research. Researchers from the National Research & Development Centre for Skills for Life (NRDC), are presenting findings for the first time, looking at effective practice in ESOL, later to be published as the ESOL Effective Practice Project (Baynham, et al., 2007) "Talk is work in the ESOL classroom" they tell me, and we should be "bringing the outside in". They describe teachers as *bricoleurs*, creating lessons from whatever materials and approaches come to hand.

2008. I am a teacher trainer and course co-ordinator on an ESOL Level 5 Teacher Subject Specialist Diploma. I am watching a teacher in a lesson where there is a rich and intriguing flow of language developing from the students. It isn't part of the stated aims of the lesson, but something arising from the lesson. The teacher, conscious of my presence and the assessment criteria of the course, chooses to close down the discussion, and silently, almost meekly, the students return to the topic.

2009. I am teaching ESOL in a community centre. The students are at Entry level 1, and we are trying to practice the present simple. As an aside, a discussion arises around a fairly shocking robbery that took place the week before. The students are all local, have all heard something of what has happened. The discussion grows and expands from one small group to the whole class. I am faced with a decision. Do I press on with the stated aims of the lesson, or do we talk about the story? I choose the latter, and we abandon the learning outcomes. Instead, language *emerges* from the conversation the students are having. This language includes past tenses, crime vocabulary, emotional terms and advice structures. *The burglar broke into the house. The woman was shocked. If I were you, I would talk to the police.*

The Trouble with ESOL

This thesis sets out to explore alternatives to the traditional outcomes-led curriculum approach used widely in ESOL. In this first chapter I will outline the context of ESOL, and of the research, and elucidate some of the issues with the way in which ESOL is taught in the UK. I will then lay out the aims of the research and define the questions which I used to explore those aims.

The context of this thesis is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL); that is English language teaching and learning for adult migrants to the United Kingdom. The term is used in the UK to distinguish this from English taught as a foreign language (EFL) (ETF, 2019). This is not due to any cognitive differences in the processes of learning, but because of the radical differences in the teaching and learning context. In EFL, the students are often learning English to use in a professional or academic context, whereas in ESOL, students are learning English for *everything*, including talking to English speaking family members. This distinction is crucial in understanding the nature and role of ESOL in the UK, but also in framing the research project which follows, which reviews and examines the nature of course design and classroom interaction in this context.

Like other aspects of adult basic skills, ESOL is expressed as a learner-centred subject, a concept which has been embedded from the very outset of modern ESOL. However, learner-centredness is itself rarely well-defined or explained despite its presence in extensive, often dictatorial guidance on the use of the curriculum, assessment cycles, and planning processes in ESOL provision. We might ask if the curriculum approach yields a truly learner-centred curriculum, if such a thing exists, or is this simply lip-service paid to a political and social attitude to education? If not, what alternative approaches exist, and how could these be applied in the ESOL classroom, while still satisfying the bureaucratic and audit requirements of a large general further education college in the UK?

Skills for Life and Beyond

To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary to go back to the beginning, or at least *a* beginning. The challenges of immigration and the education of immigrants is a question almost as old as society – certainly the language learning of migrants to the UK has been an issue since the late Middle Ages and has continued to be so. For much of this time, ESOL was a fragmented and disparate provision carried out by charitable individuals, groups, and local government identifying the needs of their population (Rosenberg, 2008).

ESOL as it currently exists, however, has its roots in the Skills for Life agenda. This was a programme which grew out of *A Fresh* Start, commonly referred to as the Moser Report (DfES, 1999) which established a need for focused basic education in literacy and numeracy, and the subsequent report *Breaking the Language Barriers* (DfES, 2000) which addressed the learning needs of those residents of the UK for whom English is not an expert language. From these two reports, curriculum documents and their corresponding materials were developed, along with, in time, a series of qualifications up to Level 2, as well as subject specific teaching qualifications at Level 5 and above. The programme also brought with it comprehensive and generous funding, which raised the profile not only of ESOL, but also adult literacy and numeracy learning. As a result, the ESOL provision became more coherent and consolidated, with control over funding *and* teaching practices being centralised. For example, the imposition of the Skills for Life structure (to which we shall return) across literacy, numeracy and ESOL, including processes such as individual learning plans, target setting and tracking, and so on. This was done, according to Sheila Rosenberg "to ensure parity of esteem and equal access and opportunity for ESOL learners" (2008, p.223). It was a process of some compromise, not least from a pedagogic viewpoint, not least because ESOL has more in common with second language acquisition and applied linguistics than with first language literacy teaching (Cooke & Simpson, 2008).

The intervening decades since this centralising of ESOL provision have not been generous in terms of funding nor in terms of sympathy towards migrants. Between 2010 and 2017, for instance, funding for ESOL fell from £203 million to £99 million, with increased restrictions on access to that funding causing a corresponding decrease in uptake (Simpson, 2019, p.28). The reasons for this are beyond the scope of the current work, but this is almost certainly in line with the needs of a government reluctant to be seen to be spending money on the immigrant population, the target of toxic anti-immigrant popularism in the popular press and elsewhere (Greenslade, 2020; UNHCR, 2019). As Cooke & Peutrell (2018, p.1) note, shortly following the Brexit vote, there was "an increase in nationalist, xenophobic sentiment in which language seemed to be playing a central role." Cooke, et al. (2018) refer to the "language discrimination … exacerbated by the campaigns leading up to the EU referendum in June 2016; the weeks and months after saw a rise in racist and xenophobic attacks on those speaking languages other than English." (ibid. 2018, pp.6-7). As Rosenberg observes, "ESOL had often had a political dimension, and governments, sensitive to domestic prejudice, had often chosen to channel their support through the voluntary sector" (2008, p.260). More recently, Cooke et al. (2023) present an overview of these national and regional changes to ESOL, detailing numerous

reports and initiatives (Cooke et al., 2023. p.6) which have only served to cement the nature of this fragmented and underfunded sector, leading to a system which only offers "guidance on effective practice in co-ordinating ESOL locally" (ibid.) rather than a cohesive national strategy such as that recommended by NATECLA (2016, 2022) and supported in policy in the 2019 Green Paper *Integrated Communities Strategy*. Such things have failed to materialise, and at the time of writing, no national strategy remains in England.

Skills for Life for adult literacy and numeracy have since been largely replaced by Functional Skills, albeit with standards based loosely on the old Skills for Life curriculum documents. For ESOL, however, Skills for Life still exerts a significant influence over the practices of teachers, organisations, awarding organisations, and funding bodies. Indeed, while the funding and status of ESOL and ESOL learners has diminished over the last decade, very little would appear to have changed in the approaches and methods applied in English language teaching to migrants in the UK – over ten years of stasis, where approaches laid out at the turn of the century remain current and unchallenged. Ofsted inspectors "will judge how well providers record and recognise learners' progress and achievements to inform teaching and support programmes to help learners reach their goals." (Ofsted, 2021) for example, suggesting that a clear documentary trail is a requirement, and with the publication of a "new" Skills for Life strategy for England and Wales (FETL, 2021), the "Learning Journey" is clearly still there, presented unquestioningly as good practice, as all courses should include "diagnostic assessment" and, tellingly "individual learning plans" (ibid.). The language and discourse of Skills for Life has evidently not changed. Instead, it prefers this somewhat deficit medicalised framing, implying that literacy, numeracy and language skills are some sort of social ill to be cured through the intervention of a benign and generous government.

Funding cuts continue, however, and this reduction in funding combined with clear governmental control over practices laid out in Skills for Life (SfL) and enforced by Ofsted which restrict the development of pedagogical practices. Individuals and organisations which are already feeling pressured operate in fear of further financial reprisals should they reject core tenets of the SfL process (target setting, the assessment cycle, a detailed and thorough course plan), meaning that experimentation and challenge is only ever carried out within very safe boundaries. A review and re-evaluation of these entrenched processes is long overdue, as the context of ESOL teaching is vastly different to the contexts of ESOL during the early part of the 21st century – class sizes are larger, and many of the innovations suggested by Moser and subsequently implemented are now part of the accepted landscape, for example subject

specialist teaching qualifications and crucially subject specific exams are now firmly a part of ESOL.

ESOL course planning

As it currently stands, ESOL course planning still follows a trajectory laid out by the Skills for Life agenda. This centres around a single key curriculum document, the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (AECC) (DfES, 2001), and on a specific series of assessment practices, often summarised as the *Learning Journey* in the documentation of the time. These practices included an initial assessment to establish level, diagnostic assessment to establish specific needs at that level, target setting to evidence achievement, with ongoing formative assessment and summative assessment leading to externally recognised qualifications. What is striking about this process is the continued focus on the assessment of learning with minimal indication as to how this learning would take place. Optimistically labelled "exemplar" materials were made widely available at the time, linked to predictable topics such as work, health, shopping, education, and so on.

At the same time, however, the materials also consistently position the student as passive recipients – the customer, the employee, the student, the patient, the applicant, the client: service users, not service providers. Such roles are reminiscent of Freire's "passive entities" (1970, p.57) in a banking model of education who should be made "more passive still" by education (ibid.). Almost never are the students portrayed as agents of action and change. While these roles perhaps related to the perceived needs of the migrant population, in terms of needing access to such services in their day-to-day life suggests unintentional subconscious prejudice against ESOL learners, assuming that all learners face the same limited range of challenges, passive consumers and guests in a not always welcoming society. It could be argued that students perhaps do need to understand these contexts from a passive viewpoint *before* they can become active participants. After all, the reality of life for many is that they do indeed fulfil these roles. However, as Freire (1970) argues, the role of education should be to present a more balanced view of the status and role of the learners.

Considered collectively, ESOL learners are far from homogenous – rather they are *superdiverse*, a concept where diversity is seen not only in terms of ethnicity but also in terms of

> differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete gender and age profiles, patterns

> of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents.
>
> (Vertovec, 2007, p.1025).

As a working example, the class in this research consisted of students from Russia, Sri Lanka, Iraq, India, Morocco, Pakistan, Italy and Spain. The range of education and career experiences was equally diverse, from professionals with university educations to individuals who have never worked or studied since leaving school at 16. They were parents, widows divorcees, workers, small business owners, aspiring teachers, and in one case a primary school governor, actively involved in their communities, with a breadth of age from their early 20s to their mid-60s. This is not a cherry-picked detail – this range of difference is the norm, even for an ESOL class in a small town, and borne out in the descriptions of students in almost every study of ESOL practice (e.g. Baynham, et al. 2007, Barton & Pitt, 2003, Cooke, et al, 2013). To compress this superdiversity into a homogenous blend of basic needs is to do a disservice to the astonishing range of individual need and challenge. "People's language needs differ, often greatly," writes Michael Long (2015, p.11), "almost always far more extensively from one to another… than an outsider would ever anticipate." This superdiversity is not a barrier to be overcome, however. It is a rich and exciting resource to be explored and celebrated in the community of the classroom.

The Adult ESOL Core Curriculum

The AECC is a complex document. Based primarily on the national literacy standards of the time, and linked directly to the Literacy Core Curriculum, it takes the literacy standards and then adds to them, reflecting the more complex nature of ESOL, which involves not only learning to write in a language the learner can already use, but also learning the underlying structures of that language, and the cultural contexts and conventions around that language. For example:

Literacy Level 1 Engage in Discussion	**ESOL Level 1 Engage in discussion**
use appropriate phrases for interruption – know what to say to create an opportunity to make a contribution at an appropriate time (DfES, 2001b, p.44)	• use appropriate phrases for interruption • know when it may be considered acceptable to interrupt, and understand

	that the acceptability of interrupting can vary across cultures • understand that the way interrupting can be done will depend on the size of the gathering as well as on the formality of the situation • have strategies for dealing with unwelcome interruptions (DfES, 2001a, p.279)

In adult literacy it is only necessary to learn *what* should be said when interrupting, but for an ESOL learner it is also necessary for the student to learn *when* it is appropriate to use it, and with *whom*. Any contextual and cultural elements are simply assumed in the literacy curriculum.

As well as the skills competencies thus described, the AECC also includes, for each level, information regarding grammatical structures, as well as communicative functions. The AECC attempts to be all things to all people. Its link to the literacy standards dictates a structure competency based (Richards & Rogers, 2001, Auerbach, 1986), with some functional-notional elements (Nunan, 1988) but at the same time attempts to shoehorn in a grammatical syllabus, linking specific structures to each level. What is strikingly absent from the AECC is any detailed consideration of vocabulary items, except where these are universally applicable and have a more structural rather than lexical function, for example discourse markers such as *however* and *therefore*. Even here, however, the attention to lexis is minimal, and more topic-based vocabulary items remain almost entirely untouched, with little or no guidance as to how lexical learning may be developed. This is something of a serious oversight. Lightbown and Spada highlight that "although circumlocution and gesture can sometimes compensate, the importance of vocabulary can hardly be overestimated." (2005, p.96)

To explore this specific point further, vocabulary learning is not simply about denotation, spelling and the pronunciation, but also any layers of connotation and inference, collocation, register (social appropriacy), not to mention a range of grammatical information about how the word should function in a sentence. On the face of it, a word like "get" may appear to be relatively simple, but even in the most basic of senses it has at least two meanings (*gain* and

become). Once in combination with other words it starts to change again (*get out, get on with, get home, get together*), changes from verb to noun (a get-together) or to an adjective (a *get-out* clause) or appear in an unusual form (*ill-gotten gains*). This is even before we start to consider the different ways it changes according to which part of the English-speaking world you happen to be in. *Get* is perhaps an easy example, but almost all words in any language operate on a range of levels, and so to learn a word is no small task, and to provide little or no guidance as to how a teacher might enable this is a significant oversight on the part of a curriculum document like the AECC.

The influence of the AECC on course planning, then, is quite complex, from the dictatorial (functional competencies) to the indifferent (grammar) to the almost entirely absent (vocabulary). For many teachers, including the author of this paper, level is commonly defined through grammatical structure, often tenses, rather than through communicative competence. This is perhaps because grammatical structure is much easier to codify and design, and also reflects common practice in EFL courses and materials. This focus on grammar structures also aligns with student expectation, as we shall see in chapter 5. Correspondingly, these structures most frequently form the defining function of the course plan.

In second language learning literature, (e.g. Nunan, 1988, Nation & McAlister 2009, Richards, 2018) the AECC represents a product syllabus where the "focus is on knowledge and skills which learners should gain." (Nunan, 1988, p.35). Language is divided up into discrete nuggets to be learned in a tidy and complete sequence, even though learning language does not work that way. This product syllabus, based on pre-set learning outcomes, managed entirely by the teacher, is not the only model, and can be contrasted with the shared collaborative models of curriculum design, in line with Freirean approaches to developing curriculum content – a point to which we will return in chapter 2.

The "Learning Journey"

In order to better understand the problem at hand let us now explore the concept of the 'Learning Journey', a key concept contained within early Skills for Life documentation (DFES 2001e). It attempts to define the stages of the learner's process through a typical course. It focusses primarily on the sequence of assessments which take place from when the student arrives at the course, to when they finish and progress to the next level, whereupon the cycle begins anew.

The stages are as follows.

- Initial Assessment places learners on a course at the right level.
- Diagnostic Assessment – to clearly identify the specific needs of the learner.
- Individual Learning Plan – "sets out the learner's plan to learn, a timetable for learning, ways of learning and resources required." (LSIS 2009, p.2) including longer term goals and targets to achieve.
- Formative Assessment – to review progress against the targets laid out in the ILP.
- Summative Assessment – "provides evidence of what a learner has achieved at the end of each learning episode. It provides feedback to a learner and teacher on achievements in relation to the standards and curriculum documents." (ibid.) This may be a final exam, accredited by an external awarding body.

The teacher then selects, develops and delivers the content based on the outcomes of these formalised assessments.

There are numerous issues to be explored here, and not all of them relevant to our current discussion. Assessment is a complex area, and the processes outlined above require teachers to have not merely *pedagogical* understanding but also confidence in their assessment literacy – that is the ability to develop assessments and to recognise the shortcomings of any assessments which occur (e.g. Hughes, 2003). Notions such as *reliability* (the extent to which an assessment, if done again, would produce the same results) and *validity* (the extent to which assessment assesses what it *claims* to assess) (Hughes, 2003) are crucial here, but curiously lacking in many diagnostic assessments. As the name suggests, these assessments claim to "diagnose" the gaps in a student's language ability, but to genuinely do so would require extensive hours of assessment. The DfES "exemplar" assessments (2001) test each item once only, often using multiple choice questions, meaning that a lucky student could quite easily present an inaccurate overview, meaning that any course design decisions, individual targets and so on based on this are incredibly problematic. Even in a piece of free writing is hard to distinguish between a mere slip where students can self-correct, to a more profound error where students are unable to self-correct (Edge, 1999).

Such a lack of test validity with many such assessments casts doubt upon the role of the Individual Learning Plan and the learning targets. This is a supposedly negotiated document in which a given learner's long- and short-term goals are recorded, along with a summary of diagnostic assessment results, and targets to represent stages along the way to language proficiency. According to guidance published by the DfES in 2003, near the inception of Skills for Life, targets should follow a specific structure (DFES, 2003, p.62) defined by the acronym

SMART. For example, the goal "be able to write 5 sentences about my life experiences using present perfect by November" would be considered an appropriate target, as it is:

- Specific – with reference to a single item of grammar
- Measurable – 5 sentences allowing for measurement of achievement
- Achievable – for a student at Entry level 3, this would be appropriate
- Relevant – the sentences should be about the student's own life
- Timed – the target has a clear achievement date

While this may appear to be a positive and engaging element of the course, apparently giving voice and agency to students, it is beset with challenges, particularly but not exclusively in ESOL. The obvious one is language – even higher level learners struggle to express meaningfully what they do not know in English, and the lack of a shared language means that more often than not, such targets are imposed on students by the teacher. Targets, therefore, like much of the ILP, become token nods to individualised learning, and instead, like so much of the Skills for Life agenda, have been hijacked into performance management processes, a point to which we shall return in chapter 2.

Exams: The Necessary Evil?

As well as imposing a curriculum, SfL also introduced formal, recognised exams. These were essential in ensuring parity for ESOL with numeracy and literacy and were intended to give students the stepping stones needed to progress onto further qualifications, or to be able to make use of their own qualifications in other areas. This has been relatively successful. ESOL exams are a major component of ESOL provision not only for students, but also for providers where positive achievements bring about higher levels of funding. ESOL students who pass Level 2 can find their way more easily onto GCSE English courses, as well as the positive benefit of a sense of achieving something tangible.

They are not without their problems, however. Chief among these is the concept of *washback* (or sometimes *backwash*, as in Prodromou, 1995). This can be seen as positive, for example where "an oral proficiency test is introduced in the expectation that it will promote the teaching of speaking skills." (Taylor, 2005: 154). Negative washback, on the other hand, occurs "when a test's content or format is based on a narrow definition of language ability, and so constrains the teaching/learning context." (ibid.). This might mean practising certain question types which do not reflect the reality of language use, such as gap fills, rephrasing or reordering sentences, or carrying out certain types of speaking task, reading to identify certain types of information.

This latter is certainly true of some of the areas of language which are linked to the AECC and literacy standards but which seem often divorced from reality, such as the identification of text type or purpose – elements I myself would probably rarely, if ever, touch on in a language course, but which I consciously focus on with students knowing that these areas also represent questions in the exam for which a pass is required.

There is a very real danger that exam requirements contort the course leading up to it by encouraging teachers to concentrate on activities and specific skills which reflect that content, even if direct teaching to the test is difficult in terms of specific sets of language. The importance of these exam demands is further intensified by the direct link between exam success and funding, meaning that institutions may also exert pressure on teachers, either directly or indirectly, to "train" students in those specific skills.

Like the AECC on which they are based, ESOL exams are also socially and politically loaded. The themes selected for the activities and the tasks that students have to do have connotations beyond the merely linguistic. The tests themselves are *assimilative* (Shohamy, 2006); that is they assume that test takers are working towards some form of social acceptance within British society. The students at the centre of this study, for example, were completing the City & Guilds Level 1 and Level 2 ESOL exams, which linked to the themes of Communication at Work, Finding a Job, Me & My Health, Me & My Home, Social Media, Sport & Keeping Fit, Travel & Transport, Hobbies & Interests, with sample exam topics covering Creativity, Me & My Community, Health & Safety, and Our Environment (City & Guilds, n.d.). All of these are perhaps innocuous enough, but there is a clear focus on the workplace in three of the exam topics, and the text types and activities shown in the exams again position students as the less powerful - they apply for jobs, they use services, they request information, they volunteer. The language exams thus become exercises in power: "English tests act as mediators between politics and education." (Shohamy, 2006. p.93). As we have seen, testing and language policy for migrants is often weighted against the students and their language uses, even to the extent that language tests themselves receive less value and weighting than their first language counterparts - arguably a Level 2 ESOL qualification represents knowledge and skills at least as equivalent to the "gold standard" of the English language GCSE yet lacks the recognition of that qualification, or indeed of the Functional Skills English Level 2 (Roden & Osmaston, 2021).

Exams ought to represent a means to progress and for many ESOL learners perhaps they do form the basis of subsequent progression. They are not without their challenges but ultimately form the basis of funding and are a requirement of the course. Under funding models,

organisations get more funding for students who sit and pass an exam than they do for a student who is funded through the RARPA (Recording And Recognising Progress and Achievement) process (DfES, 2003). It is, perhaps, the ultimate expression of political and organisational power that exams are preferred, even expected, and very little choice is given beyond this.

The Problem

The external demands of policy, funding and qualifications, the internal expectations of the institution, the professional beliefs of the teacher, and the complex, heterogenous motivations, expectations and interests of the learners at a course level are often disharmonious. This much is a given, perhaps, but for a process which would appear to be so very "learner centred", policy changes over time have led to a far from learner led curriculum. Courses have become exam driven, as organisations push for funding based on exam success, and individual students have come to value the qualifications in and of themselves, as well as the means to an end.

In the context of the research, ESOL is being taught in a large general FE college, where the dominant model of learning is the vocational course. In vocational learning, subjects are broken down into separate competences at which students evidence success through coursework, observation, and so on. The student demonstrates evidence of success in a given competency, which means the student has achieved, and can now move on.

The notion that subject knowledge can always be divided into neat units and curriculum references, along with the processes of the Learning Journey, and the audit-driven bastardisation of assessment for learning has led to a performance management model of education which values evidence of learning over learning itself. Audit rears its rarely welcome head as well in the form of internal requirements such as internal observation and curriculum review systems which clearly highlight and value extensive careful forward planning. While Ofsted themselves claim not to require any specific documentary evidence, the fact that.

> "Inspectors will evaluate learners' progress in relation to their starting points, based on their rate of learning, acquisition of knowledge, skills and behaviours and whether they have achieved their individual, challenging learning goals."
>
> (Ofsted 2021)

more or less requires that to prove any of this, some form of measurable audit will need to be supplied; nobody would assume that in the space of a four day visit, an inspector could observe

these happening. The issue, of course, is whether the creation of auditable records is itself a useful process, or whether it is audit for the sake of it, a point, again, to which we will return in chapter 2.

Language learning is a messy, complex, and above all *social* process. ESOL is not a subject which lends itself easily to the focussed structure of the core curriculum, or a tidy, unitised delivery. Language learning does not take place in neat gobbets to be checked off but as a complex process of interaction, and often in line with a fairly widely recognised sequence. "Language development is not just adding one rule after another. Rather it is a process of integrating new language forms and patterns in an existing interlanguage, readjusting and restructuring until all the pieces fit." (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p.189). In practice this means that a learner may appear to have learned an item of grammar, for example, evidenced in the successful achievement of a lesson outcome, but then in the very next lesson, or series of lessons, prove to be incapable of producing this language in any meaningful way. Then, some months later, after internalising, noticing and practising in a lower stakes context, perhaps, the structure appears, apparently without agency or input on the part of the teacher, and as Lightbown & Spada go on to observe, students "eventually know more than they are taught directly." (2006, p.192)

The social aspect – interaction and the opportunity for production – is a crucial element of language learning and acquisition, but social interactions are not themselves tidy or predictable. A real-life interaction rarely functions as it does in teaching materials. Take, for example, this dialogue from the ESOL Core Curriculum Materials at Entry level 1 (DFES, 2001, p.17):

> Sue: How much is this cotton material?
>
> Trader: It's £4.50 a metre.
>
> Sue: I need four metres for some curtains.
>
> Trader: Certainly. That's £18, please. Anything else?
>
> Sue: Yes. Have you got any balls of green wool?
>
> Trader: How many would you like? It's a pound a ball.
>
> Sue: Eight balls, please.

> Trader: OK, so that's £8 for the wool and £18 for the cotton. That makes £26 altogether, please

Compare this with a similarly transactional dialogue from Carter & McCarthy's (1997) collection of authentic spoken texts:

> 1<SO1> Can I have a second class stamp please Les?
>
> 2<SO2> You can ... there we are
>
> 3<SO1> Thank you
>
> 4<SO2> And one penny thank you
>
> 5<SO1> That's for me to spend is it?
>
> 6<SO2> That's right
>
> 7<SO1> I bought a new book of ten first class stamps when I was in
>
> 8 town today and I've left them at home in me shopping bag
>
> 8<SO2> Have you?
>
> 9<SO1> And I've one left
>
> 10<SO2> Oh dear [laughs]
>
> 11<SO1> Bye
>
> 12<SO2> Bye
>
> (Carter & McCarthy, 1997, p.92)

It may be somewhat churlish to compare a text pitched at Entry 1 students with a native-like interaction in the real world, but it is a valid comparison - after all, students in an ESOL context are unlikely to come across the very controlled and predictable tone of the teaching materials. In these, the dialogue is focussed, and sticks to accepted forms of initiation-response. The real-world dialogue starts formulaic with a clear "Can I have..., please?" which wouldn't look out of place in any Entry 1 teaching resource, but then quickly starts to include not only turn-taking complexities (overtalking, repeating) but also goes off topic. Even leaving aside the question of language "level", the *social* demands of a real-life service encounter are more complex than

simply asking and answering questions: "**interactional** (personal/social) language is just as important as **transactional** ('business') language." (Carter & McCarthy, p.94). In a classroom, the textual repertoires of students become limited by a restricted focus on predictable format. Woulds & Simpson (2010) examine this in more detail, highlighting not only the interplay of interactional and transactional language, but also emphasising the need for "localness" in materials. As the observe: "migrants are dealing with complexity and non-standard language in their daily lives; as ESOL teachers we need to find ways to bring the outside in." (Woulds & Simpson, 2010, p.9)

Language and language learning is disorganised and unpredictable, but the curriculum, the planning, the teaching, all assumes some element of predictability and control. It would be uncontroversial to assume that for most teachers, and certainly for *this* teacher, it is the teacher who selects both the *how* and the *what* of the course and attempts to lay this out in advance for audit and review, in line with the 'best practices' of mainstream further education. The "learning journey" metaphor suggests a model of learning where everything is carefully mapped out, except that from the student's point of view this map is full of blank spaces, some of them marked "here be dragons". The metaphor and its manifestation imply that it is possible for individuals to understand what their own blank spaces might be, and how they might be negotiated. It also suggests a direct route of learning, a straight route, punctuated by assessments, much like concrete service stations punctuate a motorway.

I would suggest that this is wrong on both counts. It is hard, if not impossible, for learners of a language (or indeed any learner) to meaningfully and usefully identify what it is they do not know about the language: "the consistent message was that the learners found it hard to analyse their language learning. Moreover, there appeared to be a degree of unease while making an attempt to do it." (Roberts et al. 2004 p.118) Even when carefully planned out by the teacher, the route is rarely straightforward – at best it is two steps forward, one step backwards, with maybe a couple of detours on the way. From my own experiences as an ESOL teacher, and from conversations with colleagues, the reality of an ESOL course is that even with a scheme of work laid out just six weeks in advance, by the end of that period, the course has moved so far from that plan that there are almost always 2-3 weeks of "work" which are carried forward, and even whole chunks of proposed lessons which remain untaught. The course twists and evolves in its own way, based on the teacher's observations of the students, ideas brought up in the class by the students. and, crucially, on language and interactions which arise naturally in and from the classroom environment. There may be a journey here, indeed, but the learning journey is no

predictable straight line. Scrivener likens this to a "jungle path" in his discussion of planning lessons, creating "the lesson moment by moment in class with you and the learners working with whatever is in happening in the room" (2011, p.144)

Research Aims and Questions

It was developing not only lessons but also entire courses along this *jungle path* version of the learning journey which informed the focus of the research. Rather than developing a course from an imposed curriculum, I needed to develop a course which arose from the students, and from their own interactions. It was, perhaps, the learning journey of reflection and action, but instigated by and developed alongside the students, rather than imposed from above by the teacher.

There existed as well a question of power and control over the curriculum, requiring a repositioning of the role of teacher and students, and what the curriculum itself can be. Paulo Freire, and the researchers and practitioners who drew inspiration from his work (e.g. Auerbach, 1992, Bryers, et al. 2013) take as a starting point a resistance to the "banking model" of education, "based on a mechanistic, static, naturalistic, spatialised view of consciousness: it transforms students into receiving objects" (Freire, 1970, p.58), and instead advocates *problem-posing* as a model of learning and education. In such an approach, the roles of student and teacher are redrawn, with the emphasis being on the group as a community of practice (Wenger, 2000).

This developing movement of participatory and critical approaches to ESOL (e.g. Auerbach, 1992, Cooke, et al. 2023), where the discourse is informed by the social role of education, has been paralleled by change in approaches to English language teaching in a wider context, with a focus on teacher methodology and the cognitive elements of language teaching and learning – through the development of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) to task based learning (Long, 2015) and thence to dogme/teaching unplugged (Thornbury, 1999) via Kumaravadivelu's post methods analysis (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In these, the focus has shifted from discrete items of grammar and vocabulary to a more emergent language model – the curriculum no longer covers the language, the teaching is not done to the students, but rather the curriculum emerges, and the language is *uncovered* (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

These approaches highlight the value of production, interaction and developing awareness of your own language – that is in order to learn it is not just gaining explicit knowledge of successive grammatical or lexical forms, but a student needs an opportunity to produce

language (output), but also to “notice” new language actively, and crucially, make use of the language in a meaningful and useful interaction.

With this thesis, I will first draw together these inter-weaving strands of sociolinguistics, applied linguistics and the philosophy behind a critical and democratic approach to developing a curriculum which is not imposed or pre-set by the teacher, the institution, or the policy context, but rather one which arises and emerges from the learners themselves in the lessons as they occur. The research will then explore an emergent language approach to a course in progress, taking on elements of participatory and critical pedagogy, and developing the notion of an ESOL classroom as a community of practice.

Where others have enjoyed relative independence and freedom to explore those approaches (e.g. Bryers, et al. 2015), or explored on a smaller, more detailed level (e.g. Gallen, 2014), this research took place in a large general further education college, on government funded and exam accredited provision. There were barriers to implementing such an approach – from the institutional requirements of that context, and from the learners themselves, but also from my own perceptions of my role as a teacher in a language classroom. Exploring those barriers, however, led to a greater depth and understanding of the research and of the methods used in the teaching.

The overarching research aim, then, was to explore and identify a framework for using an emergent language approach to a curriculum, within the audit confines of a large FE college. In order to focus this aim, the following research questions were used:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?
- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

In the next chapter we explore the conceptual underpinnings of the pedagogical approach - the theoretical underpinnings presented by, for example, Long (2015), Meddings & Thornbury (2009), the social contextual elements of participatory ESOL and frame these in a wider discussion around the issues with the competency based, product oriented curriculum in current standard practice in ESOL.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review & Conceptual Framework

> The trouble with having an open mind, of course, is that people will insist on coming along and trying to put things in it.
>
> - Terry Pratchett, Diggers

Introduction

This research focussed on the development of an emergent curriculum within the setting of a mainstream adult ESOL class in a large FE college in the UK. In order to develop such a programme, and to evaluate its effect on the learning of the students, we must first explore a range of issues. This chapter sets out to explore different models and methods in curriculum design, examine commonly used practices and concepts in ESOL, such as target setting and learner-centredness, before then exploring the foundational theories and research which were used when developing the emergent curriculum.

The first issue is the notion of curriculum itself – as a starting point in this review, I intend to clarify for myself what I mean by this term and the extent to which it is synonymous with terms such as *syllabus* or indeed *course*, and where it overlaps with concepts specific to the UK education sector such as *scheme of work*. As noted in chapter 1, organisations often require such documents as part of the audit requirements in the name of quality assurance. Because the research was rooted in instructed second language learning for adults, I was able to draw on an extensive body of literature on curriculum design in this field specifically, linked as it is to the individual and social development of a second language which is also worthy of exploration. I took a critical view of how learning is expressed – considering and critical contrasting the product driven curriculum design of learning outcomes and intentions set by the teacher, with a model based on classroom processes leading to affordances and opportunities for learning.

A negotiated curriculum is likely to be participatory and critical, and as such a discussion of the critical pedagogy laid out by Paulo Freire in 1970, and subsequently expanded upon by numerous researchers and writers, both in language teaching and beyond, including specifically to the setting of migrant language learning by Elsa Auerbach. Such an approach links to the field of critical applied linguistics (e.g. Pennycook, 2005), in which we can evaluate the position of the learner in the language classroom. I draw as well on the notion of a community of practice (Wenger, 2000) which also links to an ecological view of the classroom (Van Lier, 2004) as well as the importance of student identity as represented by their language

practices both in and out of the classroom. I also explore parallel developments in international English language teaching of the "teaching unplugged" approach championed by Scott Thornbury, "task based" second language learning and the theoretical underpinnings behind these. It is here as well that I consider not only these the *social* learning of the participatory approaches with elements of the personal and cognitive aspects of learning which are relevant here. It is necessary in particular to identify a conceptual framework around interlanguage, noticing, and the importance of interaction in the development of language (Long, 2015), internal processes, perhaps, but dependent entirely upon the social stage on which the language is performed.

And this is the key point; the beating heart of this thesis – that language learning for migrants is neither organised nor organisable, but the product of a range of unpredictable social interactions both in and out of the classroom.

Definitions

It would be tempting to spend numerous pages in a discussion of the distinction between *curriculum* and *syllabus*, but given that most sources (e.g. Graves, 2008, Richards, 2013, Stenhouse, 1975, Nunan, 1988) ascribe a variety of meanings to these words, it is perhaps easier to clarify my own definition. Kumaravadivelu (2006) summarises it perhaps the most succinctly, in that there is a hierarchy of meaning, with *curriculum* referring to elements such as assessment and purpose, as well as the content. *Syllabus*, meanwhile, is restricted to the "specification of content and the sequencing of what is to be taught." (Kumaravadivelu, 2006 p.75). This study will focus not only on the what, but also the how, and so the term *curriculum* is the most appropriate, although at times will use *syllabus* when referring to the content alone. As a point of clarity, however, a *scheme of work* refers to a specific document used in an institution to record the planning of the curriculum, including materials, assessment dates and strategies. Document formats differ from organisation to organisation, and at the time of this research, the document was a comprehensive document, including statements of intent (for example: *Why is this course important for your students? How does it link to local employment needs?*), a list of "Personal Development Behaviours and Attitudes", "Links to other units", and an "Assessment Plan". The course content itself comes after this, organised under the following headings:

- Content Aims & Learning Outcomes
- Learning Phases

- Skills & Behaviour Development
- Assessment Approach
- Delivery Mode

Most of these are unremarkable for such a document, although the third and fifth of these reflect something of the time in which the research took place, with an emphasis on personal skills and behaviour development in Ofsted's inspection framework and guidance (Ofsted, 2021). The "Delivery Mode" heading is a result of the then recent covid-19 pandemic which sent many aspects of courses online as well as face to face. It is beyond the scope of this research to compare evolving schemes of work, but as we have seen in chapter 1, the constant shift of focus in policy tends to add to such documents without often removing old and extraneous elements. The headings and the "intent" statements also reflect the political context in which the research occurred, emphasising meeting the needs of employment markets, rather than those of the students.

Curriculum Design – Models and Methods

Much of more recent work on curriculum design draws ultimately upon the notions set out by Lawrence Stenhouse in "An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development" (1975) who summarised two broad approaches to curriculum design: one of which focuses on the learning *product*, usually represented as some form of aim or outcome, and the other on the *processes*. This work itself drew on earlier writers, suggesting that given how much of Stenhouse's thinking still stands, the general notion of curriculum design and development has not moved on a great deal in the last 50 years. The terminology shifts at times, with Michael Breen (1984) using the term "propositional" rather than product-based, but captures the essence of how

> a propositional plan will represent what is to be achieved through teaching and learning as formal statements. Language knowledge and capabilities regarded as the appropriate outcomes will be organised and presented in the plan as things which are systematic; perhaps based on logical formulae, structures, networks, rules, or schemas.
>
> (Breen, 1984, p.85)

Product Based Curriculum

The product-based curriculum is the familiar, and largely unchanged, objectives-led model where "education is the means towards ends" (Stenhouse, 1975) Under a product model, objectives are seen as stemming from an overarching aim, so that "the process of systematic curriculum development rests on the analysis of general statements of aim into more specific behavioural objectives. Great store is set by precision." (ibid., p.54) Standard guidance on this tends to follow a system much like this, presented by Petty (2009):

> Specific learning outcomes or specific objectives should:
>
> - specify precisely and in concrete terms what the student should be able to do.
> - be written in such a way that it is possible to determine whether or not the objective has been achieved.
> - usually be short-term.
> - be drawn up by the teacher to suit the resources, the teacher and the students.
> - optionally, define the circumstances under which the objective is to be demonstrated and/or what constitutes an achievement, e.g. 'Translate passage 6d in less than five minutes, making fewer than four minor mistakes'.
>
> Some like the mnemonic SMART, standing for specific, measurable, agreed, realistic and timebound.
>
> (Petty, 2009, p.409)

The purpose of these behavioural objectives is to change or alter the behaviour of the students in some way whether through the acquisition of knowledge and through the development of skills (a discussion to which we will return). These objectives

> are to be formulated as a result of the consideration of the learners themselves, contemporary life outside of the school...., the nature of subjects, the philosophy of learning, or a set of values.
>
> (Stenhouse, 1975, p.53).

The focus is not only that the behaviour be altered, but also that this alteration be *visible* and therefore identifiable as having occurred.

Inevitably any discussion of learning objectives in this manner would involve some reference to that staple of initial teacher training in FE, the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives first drawn up by a committee of educators led by Benjamin Bloom in 1956 and subsequently revised by Anderson and Krathwohl in 2002, usually referred to as Bloom's Taxonomy. In this, educational objectives are classified into six cognitive categories – in Bloom's original these were *knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis* and *evaluation*, moving from the more objective and measurable to the more subjective and abstract. In the revised version these became *remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate* and *create* (Krathwohl, 2002). Thus, a distinction is drawn between "identify the ingredients of a pizza", "explain the process of making a pizza" and "evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of pizza". These categories are often compressed into "pick and mix" lists of verbs for teachers to draw on when planning outcomes for a lesson or series of lessons and have historically been presented as some form of hierarchy, suggesting that knowing and understanding are somehow less important, or less challenging, than evaluating and creating. However, as Krathwohl notes in his overview of the revised taxonomy, "the revision is a hierarchy in the sense that the six major categories of the Cognitive Process dimension are believed to differ in their complexity, with *remember* being less complex than *understand*, which is less complex than *apply*, and so on."(Krathwohl, 2002, p.215). Where things become more complex here is how these are applied to learning a language in a second language context. In a blog post on this theme, Gianfranco Conti points out that in order to engage in a relatively unremarkable activity such as a reading comprehension, a student must work on several cognitive levels at once, jumping up and down the pyramid "every time an inference is made about the meaning of each unfamiliar word, he/she will be creating meaning; every inference's correctness needs to be evaluated."(Conti, 2015). Similarly, the study and practice of a grammatical structure in a lesson may involve *remembering* the rule, *understanding* the structure, *analysing* the structure, *creating* new uses of that structure, and so on. Conti goes further, but it is enough to suggest that Bloom's taxonomy is restrictive at best and provides an unhelpful framework on which to hang a language learning curriculum.

Regardless of how they are defined, a curriculum driven by the achievement of educational objectives remains "the dominant model in the learning and skills sector today" (Tummons, 2012, p.24). It is, among other things, a very appealing model, in the sense that an outcome

driven curriculum "can be evaluated in ways which are valued by managers and government ministers: statistics, charts and other forms of quantitative data." (Tummons, 2012, p. 24). The impact of such a course can be easily measured, by all interested stakeholders, crucially, of course, those in control of funding which inevitably places influence on the manner in which courses are developed.

To return to the overall model of product-based curriculum, Stenhouse quotes extensively from a model described by Hilda Taba in the 1960s, which, if we think back to the "learning journey" in chapter 1, is strikingly familiar.

> Step 1: Diagnosis of Needs
>
> Step 2: Formulation of Objectives
>
> Step 3: Selection of content
>
> Step 4: Organization [sic] of content
>
> Step 5: Selection of learning experiences
>
> Step 6: Organization of learning content
>
> Step 7: Determination of what to evaluate and the ways and means to evaluate.
>
> (Taba, H. 1962, quoted in Stenhouse, 1975. p.55)

Although this model does not go into great detail as to the method of evaluation in step 7, this structure of curriculum development remains unremarkable almost 60 years later. By including a diagnosis of needs, it acknowledges the concept of gap between the proposed syllabus and the student's internal syllabus, while still assuming that there is a fixed distance between these two.

Synthetic Syllabus

This kind of product-based curriculum is prevalent in much of the literature on second language learning course development. David Nunan (1988) uses the term syllabus, and focuses on the course content, rather than the delivery and evaluation. He echoes Stenhouse, largely, and identifies product syllabuses as "those which focus on the knowledge and skills which learners

should gain as a result of instruction" (Nunan, 1988, p.27). Much of what follows in Nunan is concerned with this as a model.

Long (2015, p17) describes such a syllabus as being *interventionist* and *synthetic* (cf. Wilkins, 1976, Nunan, 1988): *interventionist* because it is predicated on explicit teaching and practice, i.e. interventions by the teacher; and *synthetic* because the language is divided into separate units (e.g. past simple tense, question tags, vocabulary for things in the kitchen) and this is presented in a pre-selected sequence, followed and timed according to the syllabus, rather than learner need. These are synthetic because they require the learners to take on and then to synthesise the language being presented: the component parts of language are taught sequentially and built up until the language components are pulled together and learning is completed.

There is, within such a model, some room for discussion about *which* linguistic items should be used to organise the syllabus. Grammatical structures are perhaps the most obvious and common way of organising this syllabus, where less complex structures lead to more complex ones . However, Nunan also identifies *functional-notional* syllabuses, where the learning is focussed on "the communicative purpose for which we use language" (ibid. p.35) and on "the conceptual meanings … expressed through language." (ibid.) Willis (1990) presents an alternative to this – using lexical chunks as the cornerstone of the curriculum, suggesting that language is primarily about the interrelationship of words, rather than interplay of vocabulary and structures. His criticism of the grammatical approach is quite clear, however, and he argues that the decision-making process is likely to be subjective. The lexical chunks are "grammaticalized lexis" (Lewis, 1993) where "fluency does not depend so much on having a set of generative grammar rules and a separate stock of words - the 'slot and filler' or open choice principle - as on having rapid access to a stock of chunks" (Timmis & Islam, 2003).

Long (2015) summarises these synthetic approaches memorably as "a process of filling the learner's linguistic quiver one shiny arrow at a time" (ibid., p.20) in which the "syllabus is delivered using linguistically controlled materials and pedagogic procedures suitable for the intensive practice of target forms" (ibid.). He is also typical of the criticisms of this model, arguing that these approaches "are based on the assumption that learners can and will learn what they are taught when they are taught it." (ibid. p.21) but as we saw in our discussion on the sequence of acquisition in chapter 1, this is not the case: "interlanguage development has rarely been found to be sudden, categorical or linear" (ibid). He argues as well that structures can rarely be taught in isolation - a single language item is almost always dependent on the

others around it, which creates challenges around sequencing. Issues around mental processing (ibid. p.22) mean that one step forward in the "new" item often leads to a step back in another form. As both Long (2015)and Ellis (2015) report, the sequence of acquisition is more or less "impervious to instruction" (Long, 2015. p.23) and unhelpfully so when it comes to planning sequences of input. Allwright & Hanks (2009) argue that "reducing language to a few isolated syntactic phenomena, however justified for research purposes, meant having little to say about everything else" (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p.96). While such sequences exist and may reflect the eventual productive reality of learner language, they are deeply unhelpful from a practical perspective of a complex classroom:

> "Every learner in a group is always at a different stage of learning from the others. Learners may universally have to learn item X before they can learn Y, but in practice they are never all going to have mastered X and be ready to learn Y at the same time. If there is never a moment when all are ready for Y, when should the teacher teach it?"
>
> (ibid.)

Breen (1987b) agrees that this is

> a problem for any syllabus which represents a prior organisation of subject-matter for a learner. If the learner superimposes his or her order on the new language regardless of how we organise it, then there may seem little point in our designing a syllabus in the first place.
>
> (Breen, 1987b. p.87).

These explicit, synthetic approaches lead not to language production, but to what Long (2015) refers to as "language like" behaviour (Long, 2015 p.17); that is, student generated forms which appear to be accurate and would suggest that the language item has been learned. However, in reality the production here is "simply echoic…and [does] not indicat[e] a lasting change to the learner's underlying grammar." (ibid.) As well as Long, this is an anecdotal reality for myself, where students are able to use the language by the end of lesson only for it to be unused and out of reach in the subsequent lesson..

However, perhaps the *pretence* of progress, whereby the teacher and learners create observable, measurable units of achievement (Long's language-like behaviours) aligns with some sort of "common sense" notion of learning held by both learners and teachers, not to

mention managers, teacher trainers, inspectors and policy makers - much like the issues around performative SMART targets outlined above.

Thornbury (2010) is also critical of synthetic approaches of this sort, referring to them as focussing too much on “grammar mcnuggets” which he and Luke Meddings define as “pre-selected, pre-graded, (pre-digested?) grammatical items…irrespective of any perceived need, relevance or utility.” (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, p.12). These “mcnuggets” are naturally appealing to the curriculum designer, of course, because they simplify “grammar as a psychological process [which] is much more slippery than grammar as a list of facts.” (Thornbury, 2005. p.44).

Another alternative, and one which is of particular interest in the context of a Skills for Life ESOL curriculum, is a curriculum based around *competencies*. First developed in the USA for the education of migrants during the late 1970s and early 1980s (Richards & Rogers, 2001) it focuses the structure of learning around what students can do with the language, and not on the constituent parts. “Competencies consist of a description of the essential skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours required for effective performance of a real world task or activity.” (Richards & Rogers, 2001. p.144). As well as forming the backbone of American migrant language teaching, it also forms the basis of current practice in Australia (ibid.) although this has become more individualised and focussed on needs analysis of the students and their contexts for learning (Cooke & Simpson, 2006). This is very much a parallel to the processes laid out in chapter 1 which are used in the development of the ESOL taught curriculum – replace “needs analysis” with diagnostics and targets, and the process is identical.

These policy-based, outcomes driven curriculum models are founded in a hierarchy of knowledge and politics, an argument developed by Kathleen Graves who reviews what she describes as the “specialist” approach (Graves, 2008, pp.149-151). In this description, the policy makers define policy, and the policy requires experts to define the curriculum content and procedures in line with said policy. This then is implemented by materials writers, teacher trainers, and, I would add, institutions and their management, which is then, eventually, enacted by the teachers themselves in the classrooms. Each stage reflects the one before.

> Policy gives direction to a curriculum, but also sets parameters that limit it. A syllabus and materials may organize and facilitate a curriculum, but they also constrain classroom practice.

(ibid. 2008. p.149)

Graves highlights a number of concerns, all of which are applicable here. For one, the people working at different levels of the hierarchy hold varying beliefs and opinions as to the role and purpose of the curriculum: “each different group of people performs different curricular functions, uses different discourses, and produces different curricular products” she argues, and so “each successive group uses and interprets the previous product in its own way – if it is used at all.” (ibid. p.150) and cites Wenger’s (1999) observation that people who “did not participate in producing a product that they are expected to use will interpret it according to their own beliefs, understandings and needs.” (Graves, 2008, p.150). This inevitably leads to the idea that when those higher tiers devise the curriculum, then it should be carefully implemented by the teachers in line with the thinking of the curriculum planners, and as a result:

> if there are problems in the implementation, the fault is seen to be with teachers because they were not faithful to the curriculum, not with the curriculum and those who designed it.
>
> (ibid. p.151)

This is particularly applicable to the UK ESOL context, which follows precisely this approach, and presents the same limitations, and as discussed in chapter 1, the requirements of audit and “quality assurance” place further restrictions on practice. Although observers and quality assurance schemes may claim to place trust and faith in teachers, it is arguable that the underlying assumptions behind curriculum planning documents and quality assurance processes still favour this top down, hierarchical model, even while making bold claims to being learner-centred.

Is the learner really “at the heart of the process”?

As noted in Chapter 1, the Skills for Life course planning model is often described as learner centred. One of the earliest guides to the model, devised by what was then the Department for Education and Skills, argues that it “places the learner at the heart of the learning process. It demonstrates how assessment tools, the core curricula, learning materials and national qualifications can all contribute to a quality learning experience for the individual learner.” (DfES, 2003, p.1). Indeed, the phrase is repeated throughout the document, including three “golden rules” positioned in a large central box, lest they be forgotten:

> The learner is at the heart of the process.
>
> The purpose is to improve learning and achievement.
>
> It is important for all learners in all contexts.
>
> (DfES, 2003, p.9)

The final "rule" is quite bold, given that it is in a policy document describing practices applicable to the diverse range of adult learners of ESOL, Numeracy and Literacy. However, this kind of *one size fits all* homogeneity of approach is quite common in the literature of the time, which commonly listed *best practice* of this sort. This led to Coffield & Edward (2009) arguing quite clearly that:

> any claim that a particular method or resource is 'good' or 'best practice' needs to be met with the following questions: Who says so? On what evidence? Using what criteria? 'Best' for whom? Under what conditions? With what type of students? If what is officially promoted as 'best practice' turns out to be bad practice, will the learners be compensated?
>
> (Coffield & Edward, 2009, p.376)

So what do we know of "learner-centred" approaches? Learner centredness, as noted by Bremner (2021) is not something which can be easily pinned down and is often "a term that is advocated on a theoretical or political level, but may mean relatively little in practice." (Bremner, 2021. p.1). Similarly, Starkey argues that the concept is "under-theorised and ambiguous." (Starkey, 2019, p.375)

Elsewhere, Bremner attempts to define learner-centredness, describing it as

> a teaching approach in which learners cease to be passive receivers of knowledge and become more active participants in their own learning process; learning is contextualised, meaningful, and based, wherever possible, around learners' prior knowledge, needs and interests; finally, learning is more dialogic and democratic, and learners have more control with regards to what and how they learn.
>
> (Bremner, 2019, p.54)

It is clear that in this definition, and indeed in others (e.g. Starkey, 2019, Schweisfurth, 2015) that the notion of "learner-centred" is a question not so much of *content* but rather of *power* and *interaction*. In this context, the learning content itself is secondary to how the power relations in the classroom develop that content. A more learner-centred approach in this context has been shown to have a positive change in terms of motivation (du Plessis, 2020)

This shift of power is problematic, not least for the teacher: du Plessis (ibid.) found that teachers struggled to maintain control of the classroom interactions, for example, and the student teachers in Bremner's study (2019) found that the students themselves were less than enthusiastic about engaging with such an approach and therefore found that "Some of them are not ready for this, so I have to do something in class for them to participate." (participant quoted in Bremner, 2019. p.61). As a result of this, and of policy level issues, the teachers in his study moved towards what he describes as a "hybrid" approach, using a combination of learner-centred and teacher-centred approaches. The teachers in Du Plessis's study highlighted issues around behaviour, classroom management, class size and time as putting them off the idea of a very learner-centred approach.

Schweisfurth (2013) highlights as well the issues which arise from a policy level: "when reform promotes change in learner-centred directions, there are many examples where examination regimes remain intact, testing a fixed curriculum and carrying high stakes for learners. Teachers and learners are motivated primarily to prepare for these." (Schweisfurth, 2015, p.263). Curriculum content, then, remains influenced by the processes which have put the course into place, and while the AECC and the Learning Journey model arose at the same time, the AECC and the exams have come to exert great power over the design and development of courses.

However, Schweisfurth lays out 7 "minimum standards" of learner centred teaching approaches (p.262-265). The first of these is that "lessons need to be engaging, motivating students to learn" (ibid. p.262) – the importance of motivation cannot be underestimated in terms of its impact on language learning (e.g. Lightbown and Spada, 2009, p.63, Dornyei, 2001). Motivation is a dynamic, and changing feature, however (Ellis, 1997) and one which can be influenced not only but the traditional "instrumental/integrative" concerns, where language learning is improved by external drivers (finding a job, getting a qualification, etc.) or by intrinsic factors (e.g. interest in language and language learning), but also by micro-motivational factors such as mood, distractions, and the essential interestingness of the lesson itself. "Classrooms are such complex places that no single motivational principle can account for what goes on in them." (Ellis, 2004. p. 538)

There should also be “mutual respect between teachers and learners, and for a communal atmosphere and interpersonal relationships which reflect this.” (Schweisfurth, 2013. p.265) This again highlights the question of power in the classroom, and the shift in relationships between the teacher and the student.

Schweisfurth’s third factor is that “what is taught needs to build on learners’ existing knowledge and skills.”. She is careful to point out, however, that this existing knowledge is not always in line with the demands of an external curriculum and that “National curricula are not always realistic in themselves, and the assumption that cohorts pass fully ready from each stage to the next in a systematic manner is flawed.” (p.264) She also argues here for the development of the individual learning plan and scaffolding based on this but acknowledges that this is often unfeasible due to external constraints.

“The fourth minimum standard reinforces the importance of dialogic teaching, which has been shown to support learning and to make it visible.” (p.264). It is perhaps inevitable that interaction is a key element of language learning (Long, 2015, Lightbown & Spada, 2009, Mackey, 1999), and therefore a dialogic approach which focuses on the interactions between teacher and students and between students is crucial here. This is not unproblematic, of course – similar practical issues of classroom management and monitoring arise when introducing an element of dialogue and interactional freedom. Crucially, Schweisfurth makes it clear that this kind of teaching approach is one which avoids a “preoccupation with outcomes”, but that this again has its own issues in the prevailing pedagogy. We will, however, return to outcomes and interaction later in this review.

The fifth and sixth of these minimum standards are concerned with curriculum. In the fifth, for example, the curriculum content should be relevant to learners’ lives. This is nothing new and has been a feature of Ofsted reviews of ESOL, and indeed of ESOL guidance and teaching materials, since the inception of Skills for Life, if not before (Rosenberg, 2006). Here, the focus of the curriculum is not just on making the curriculum focussed on the learner’s lived experiences, but also on being *responsive* to the changing needs of the learners in the lessons and the course taught. There are issues with this – and this is clear in the clear content of the ESOL Core Curriculum materials mentioned in Chapter 1 – in particular the question of “who decides what is relevant to learners’ lives, and how far is this about an individual child or a collective?” (Schweisfurth, 2013. p.264).

The sixth standard is also curriculum related, but this time relating to the content in terms of skills or knowledge, although this is less of a concern for ESOL learning – where a strict dichotomy is not one which can be readily applied in this context. After all, to "know" a grammatical structure is more than simply the explicit knowledge of the structural rules, but also the tacit knowledge of application in a practical context. Similarly, the skill of reading requires a range of integrated knowledge and understanding (Nation, 2020).

Finally, Schweisfurth acknowledges the work of Black and Wiliam (2005) on formative assessment – "assessment processes should be meaningful for those being assessed so that their learning is improved by it." (Schweisfurth, 2015, p.264). Here she pulls together the other standards, in the sense that assessment should reflect the balance and focus of content in the curriculum, and that it is a crucial aspect of the dialogical approach to learning.

Targets and Goals: Performance Managed Learner-Centredness?

Target setting and goal-orientation almost always arises in any work on learner-centredness and agency, in terms of negotiation of course content, method and direction. Certainly, in a UK ESOL context, as referred to in the first chapter, target setting with students is a key component to the learning journey. According to Starkey (2019) this provides "agency in the learning process through intention, forethought, self-regulation and self-reflection." Frank Coffield (2009) agrees, in his advice to a putative FE student: "make sure you remain in control of choosing, modifying and monitoring your targets." (Coffield, 2009. p. 28)

In both of these examples, however, the learner agency is clear: students are, or should be, in charge of these targets. Much official advice and guidance follows a similar model, (e.g. DfES 2003, Duckett & Jones, 2006) and as explained in chapter 1, their use is highlighted as good practice by Ofsted in the 2021 Education Inspection Framework for FE:

> Inspectors will evaluate learners' progress in relation to their starting points, based on their rate of learning, acquisition of knowledge, skills and behaviours and whether they have achieved their *individual, challenging learning goals*.
>
> (Ofsted, 2021, p.47. my italics)

The prescribed model for these targets in current ESOL practice is through the use of SMART targets. SMART targets originated in the world of business. The term was coined by George

Doran in 1981 as a model to improve productivity in the workplace. In his terms, he argued for goal setting which was:

- Specific – target a specific area for improvement.
- Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.
- Assignable – specify who will do it.
- Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.
- Time-related – specify when the results can be achieved.

(Doran, 1981)

The labels have changed over time, with "assignable" becoming *achievable*, and "realistic" sometimes being changed to *relevant*. I have explored elsewhere (Shepherd, 2017) the background and the rooting of this in goal setting theory (e.g. Locke and Latham, 2006) where there is a distinction between generalised goals (e.g. learn grammar) and specific goals (use present perfect). Here the issue is in the phrasing - the focus is on evidence of performance, not on learning. This is sometimes a requirement of funding, for example through the RARPA (Recording And Recognising Progress and Achievement) process (Duckett and Jones, 2006; DfES, 2003) where the demand is that evidence must be produced to demonstrate progress. Therefore an appropriate target might be "use past simple five times in a short paragraph correctly." In a case such as this, the very specificness of the target is problematic. The mention of the grammar point implies that the target is meant to reflect an understanding of that grammar point, but as we know from second language acquisition theory, producing language is not the same as knowing it (Ellis, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 2005). If applied to a competency, for example reading skills, the specificity remains an issue: "read a text and identify 6 details" can *only* be taken to mean that the student has done it once, and not that it is a skill acquired. Thus the act of producing such a measurement becomes meaningless to both teacher and student.

Targets may have a motivating agentive value where individual students have sufficient meta-awareness of their own abilities to reflect on and analyse their own performance, however, for students whose English language skills are already limited, even at higher levels, they can be extremely challenging to meaningfully negotiate. There is a challenge in identifying goals and reflecting and evaluating language, as highlighted by Phillida Schellekens (in Roberts, et al. 2004, pp.114-127). Here, students "whose ability to speak English enabled them to express

their views perfectly well" (Roberts, et al. p118) were nevertheless unable to evaluate their own learning, nor indeed identify the reasons why this would be difficult. As a result, Schellekens posits that "teachers and learners cannot take for granted the learners' ability to reflect on their learning needs or their ability to manage communication with native language speakers." (ibid. p.127) and that for students, it is "even harder to predict language needs in that learners of another language cannot be aware of aspects that they have not yet uncovered." (ibid.) Schellekens was working with advanced level learners, but, as Mallows (2006) observes,

> learners at Entry Levels 1 and 2 ... do not have sufficient command of the language to engage in meaningful negotiation with their teacher about what language goals to include on their ILPs. (Mallows, 2006, p.17)

This is supported by Larsen-Freeman et al, (2021) who, while acknowledging the motivational value of goal setting and discussion in terms of developing learner agency, they concede that "students may not know what their goals should be at the beginning of the school year or how to state them in English, but they can discover their goals and revise them as the course progresses." (Larsen-Freeman, et al. 2021, p.). As with Dornyei (2001) the role of target setting here is motivational, rather than evaluative, and just one tool or aspect of learner agency and motivation to be deployed among many others. Indeed, from a motivational perspective, more effective and engaging goals are often activity led, rather than performance led – as in the examples used by Lewandowski (2021) which focus on developing learning skills, rather than demonstrating performance. Lewandowski also moved targets away from the SMART paradigm, using targets which emphasised reflection, aligning them more closely with student knowledge and awareness.

However, this more open-ended target setting, as part of an ongoing, reflective process, is rarely used in ESOL in a mainstream educational setting, essentially because, while appearing to be negotiated and learner led, the syllabus in fact remains a product-based course - achievement of targets *requires* an observable product. Rather than being learner-centred, it simply creates the *illusion* of learner centredness, while still fitting into audit and performativity demands to the benefit of the organisation and in favour of the policy makers. Bailey & Colley (2015) describe this as a "dual interpretation" of learner-centredness and found that "teachers regard it as a pedagogical approach focused on developing independent learners, and colleges interpret it as an approach focused on targets and outcomes" (Bailey & Colley, 2015, p.165). They argue that a targets-led approach has led to learner-centredness being "subverted and

misappropriated by colleges and policymakers and is now being applied as an accountability lever" (ibid. p.166). Cooke (2006) takes this criticism a step further, arguing that

> systems such as ILPs and an obsessive focus on 'measurable outcomes' and the acquisition of skills as commodities might actually serve the demands of the market somewhat better than the real individual needs of learners.
>
> (ibid. p.59)

These comments echo the critique of target setting offered by Michael Fielding (1999) writing in the early days of the New Labour government, at the same time as the Skills for Life programme was being drawn up, that the emphasis on auditable outcomes leads to control and limitation: "the current mania for performativity enhances and extols the very narrowness inherent in its intellectual make-up."(Fielding, 1999. p.278). Gregson & Nixon (2011) also offer a critique of such an approach to learner-centredness, arguing that the learning of adult basic skills becomes "simply a commodity to be packaged, marketed and sold to learners" (ibid., p. 4)

Kumaravadivelu (2006, p.155) picks up this argument that "learner-centred" approaches in ELT (e.g. communicative language teaching) are still essentially product-based, that is focussed on the outcomes of the learning process. This is paralleled in Nunan (1988), who also describes communicative approaches through a product-based lens, as do Nation and Macalister (2010) who describe a process entirely in line with the product-based curriculum described by Stenhouse – moving from an analysis of needs matched against a predefined list of outcomes, with the deficit being taught to bring students in line with the expectation of the curriculum, whether it be locally decided through following a course book, or nationally set, as in the Adult ESOL Curriculum.

Nation and Macalister are relatively prescriptive, and in many ways offer little update on Nunan (1988). At the same time as conceding that "very few teachers or researchers now follow any particular method or approach in their language teaching," (p.37) they then lay out 20 general principles of course design. These include an insistence that "the course should have explicit language teaching goals and that there should be some way of ensuring that there is opportunity for the goals to be reached" (p.45). These goals are thence to be checked off against an externally set list.

Whatever the organising principle, these approaches remain focused entirely on product - working to achieve the production of items in order to represent some inaccurate and misguided notion of "progress". However, as we have seen, the reality of what is happening in the learners' brains as evidenced by what *does* get produced is often at odds with what teachers intended to achieve. So what other aspect of the curriculum could be used as an organising principle?

Process Curriculum

The other key aspect of the course, aside from the outcomes and their assessment is the selection of learning activities. When these are used as an organising principle, the syllabus is known as a *process* syllabus. The term was developed in Stenhouse (1975) who argues for a curriculum based on "procedures, content and criteria" (Stenhouse, 1975, p.85) – essentially the focus is on the activities which take place in the classroom, with criteria here referring not to behavioural objectives, but rather to the criteria upon which activities should be selected.

> The analysis of the criteria for worthwhile activities and of the structure of activities deemed to be worthwhile appears to point much more clearly to principles of procedure in teaching.
>
> (ibid. p.89)

Nunan follows Stenhouse in this, describing a process or procedural model as leading from "the specification of tasks and activities that learners will engage in in class." (Nunan, 1988, p.42), which blurs the boundaries between syllabus and the method of its delivery. It is worth noting here that Nunan is careful to distinguish between the idea of a syllabus as the content of the course – the *what* – and the methodology – the *how* – as two fundamental aspects of the overall curriculum design, but by dividing these clearly places an importance on a measurable "what". This evaluation of the syllabus and its alignment with external assessments and exams is challenging, and picked up in part by Stenhouse, but perhaps remains the biggest challenge for the research on which this thesis is based – marrying up a process curriculum with a system of assessment and evaluation based entirely on measurable outcomes.

Graves (2008) presents a viewpoint which can go some way to squaring the circle of the process curriculum and its evaluation. For Graves, the curriculum is *not* the policy, the documents, the syllabus, but rather it is something which only exists when it is *enacted* in the classroom "shaped by the purposes and cross-purposes of teacher, student, subject matter and

classroom" and that therefore "a curriculum cannot exist before it is enacted." (ibid. p.152). The evaluation and assessment are an ongoing and cyclical process which interacts with the syllabus and the classroom activities – "The processes of planning, enacting and evaluating are interrelated and dynamic, not sequential." (ibid.)

Michael Breen (1984) defines a process curriculum in a language learning context most neatly, applying the journey metaphor further, arguing that the curriculum:

> would prioritize the route itself; a focusing upon the means towards the learning of a new language. Here the designer would give priority to the changing process of learning and the potential of the classroom-to the psychological and social resources applied to a new language by learners in the classroom context. One result of this change of focus would be that the syllabus could become a plan for the gradual creation of the real syllabus of the classroom, jointly and explicitly undertaken by teacher and learners.
>
> (Breen, 1984, p.52)

Thus the planner focuses on *activity* and remains open to the potential opportunities afforded by that activity, the *how* rather than the *what*. Such an approach then centres the curriculum on the classroom activity and the interactions it engenders: the classroom as an environment in its own right, not a window onto the wider world of the students' lives. "What happens in classrooms is the evolving relationship between teacher, learners and subject matter." (Graves, 2008. p.153).

Breen, however, particularly in his earlier commentaries, still seems to hold onto the notion that a process curriculum should be focused on set objectives, rather than being a space in which outcomes can develop. A process syllabus, in his framing, "more directly address[es] the ways in which *learners may achieve objectives* and how they navigate the route itself" (Breen 1987b, p. 161). Over time, Breen's approach to the process syllabus softens somewhat, so that by the turn of the century his arguments are more towards a *negotiated syllabus*, which we shall now explore.

Negotiating the Syllabus

Breen & Littlejohn (2000) build a comprehensive overview of the process syllabus particularly one which highlights negotiation and decision making. Here, a process syllabus identifies:

1. the range of decisions that can be open to negotiation.
2. the steps in the negotiation cycle, and
3. the elements or levels in the classroom curriculum to which the negotiation cycle can be applied.

(Breen & Littlejohn, 2000. p.30)

The "range of decisions" can be around all or any aspects of the learning process: purpose, content, method, types of interaction and, importantly, the "preferred means of evaluation of…the work…so that new directions in the work can be identified." (ibid. p.31). This is cyclical negotiation which involves the teacher as much as an equal as a superior, but which can be carried out on a macro level (of the whole course) or as an ongoing process of interaction and meaning making within and between specific lessons and even individual activities. For Breen & Littlejohn (ibid), however, this is all an open framework, within which "there is not one process syllabus or even a typical process syllabus, but a range of different teacher-student applications of the framework" (ibid. p.37).

In the same book, Stefan Slembrouck (2000) describes teaching a negotiated process syllabus within a more limiting context and the "clashes with the dominant educational culture." (Slembrouck, 2000. P.145). When attempting to make use of a negotiated syllabus, he found that, among others, the students' preconceptions of the language course were themselves "methodologically conservative" (ibid.) in that they preferred explicit language teaching of grammar points and ideas. He identifies a "correctness culture" in language learning where students, perhaps understandably, place high value on being right, but at the same time find "this culture is something they dread." (Slembrouck, 2000. p.146). He acknowledges that a "problematising approach to methodology carries with it an element of uncertainty" (ibid.) which may well have put off students on the course. He also records that the dominant culture was one which favours production of discrete items of language, and the high stakes value of this production. Again, this pushing against the product oriented not only faced institutional challenges, but also ran against the expectations of the students. He also highlights a need for maintaining a focus on language – that is ensuring that students are aware that they are learning language, that the negotiated processes are not simply unconnected activities.

Allwright (2005) is somewhat critical of the fully negotiated approach, albeit from a different perspective. He sees the negotiated syllabus as potentially restricting, as it potentially "fails to recognise the possibility of [the students] learning all sorts of other things in the process, if they were truly open to all the incidental learning opportunities that their learning processes offered" (Allwright, 2005. p.13). His argument concludes that this approach doesn't escape from the controlling notion of learning outcomes and simply "encourages learners to adopt a teaching point mentality themselves." (ibid.) In essence, a negotiated syllabus will most often still a product based syllabus, just one in which students are claimed to be involved in, and one which still fails to take on board the richness of opportunity afforded by the language classroom.

But if we want to capture this and make this work in an FE college setting, how best can we go about this, and what approaches can inform the development of such a curriculum? We will now consider what kind of language syllabus theory can underpin a process syllabus, before exploring three models which lend themselves to the context and to the students: Task Based Language Teaching, dogme ELT and participatory ESOL.

An Analytic Syllabus

In contrast to the synthetic approach to syllabus design, where the individual elements are presented explicitly, and then pieced together by the students to enable communication (Long, 2015, Nunan, 1988) an analytic syllabus *starts* with communication before *analysing* the language involved. The learners are simply exposed to the target language, with no explicit teaching of specific items. In this very basic form, it assumes that much of the language learning for adults is identical, or at least similar to that capacity enjoyed by children, and therefore classroom activities should be focussed on recreating child learning contexts, with a link to the "natural" approaches. Language is learned analytically here, "present the target language whole chunks at a time, without linguistic interference or control" (Long & Crookes, 1992, p.27) where students are simply exposed to language and attempt to use it in a meaning-focussed communication.

There are many challenges with this fully analytic model - meaning-first makes sense for adults learning, especially in ESOL, perhaps, where motivational needs are often practical or integrative (Dornyei, 2001; Sidaway, 2021). However, there remains a need for guidance. Henshaw & Hawkins (2022) make this point well - while there is no evidence that explicit instruction is necessary for language learning, it is, however, helpful. If implicit, incidental learning were sufficient in adults, then, as Long (2015) puts it, successful adult learners "would

be two a penny." Adults learn languages differently to children, with different success rates and different stances to learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2005; Ellis, 2016; Newport, 2020), despite some superficial similarities (such as the order of acquisition). This is in addition to the importance of negative feedback in language learning, for example error correction, because "L2 learners sometimes make incorrect generalizations (in many cases based on the mother tongue) that cannot be disconfirmed by positive evidence alone." (White, 1991, p.134) - in White's (ibid.) case, adverb position in French and English, a language feature which should be eminently learnable through exposure due to its high frequency and simple rule (adverbs can come between the verb and the object in French, but not English e.g. **Jean watches often the television*, but not between the subject and the verb in French e.g. **Jean souvent regarde la television*.) was simply not being acquired without explicit external explanation. In cases such as this communication can be achieved with minimal confusion, and therefore the rule is not noticed. Ellis (2015) suggests that this communicative effectiveness is one of the reasons why indefinite articles in English tend to be quite late in acquisition, but the very flexible and frequent -ing form tends to be earlier in acquisition. Consider the impact on communication in a sentence such as "Yesterday, I going cinema watching film" where meaning is entirely and unambiguously clear. In short, some sort of negative feedback in the form of error correction is needed, along with an explicit explanation of the rule in order that the learner attends to and notices (Schmidt, 1993), the language. While this may happen eventually for students over time in an immersive context, this extended process is deeply inefficient, when explicit instruction may achieve the same end in a much quicker time.

Exploring Alternatives

Focus on Form & Task Based Language Teaching

Long suggests a third way, which he uses to lay the grounds for Task Based Language Teaching. In this, the benefits of the meaning focussed communication in analytic approaches makes use of directed tasks. These tasks then lead to language arising which can be openly analysed and discussed in the lessons.

Long divides tasks into *target tasks* and *pedagogic tasks*. A target task in Long's definition, is something the NA [needs analysis] will identify as what our students need, or will need, to be able to do in the L2." (2015, p.108), i.e. the everyday definition of task. A *pedagogic* task, as the name suggests, is an activity set in the classroom, for learning purposes. Long also uses the term *task-supported* for this kind of task. In this model, the target tasks are intended to be the

organising principle for the course, and the language to be taught should arise through completing the tasks. Thus an identified need such as *talking to the doctor about problems* might lead to pedagogical tasks like *describing how you feel, asking for information* and of course, *understanding the responses*. Long (ibid), like Willis (n.d.), suggests recording native like conversations in order to help facilitate this.

Focus on Form or Focus on Forms?

In this approach the central premise of an analytic syllabus is that it is led by learner need, based in communication and focused on meaning making through interaction. In Breen's (1984) words, "the Task-Based syllabus focuses upon communicative knowledge as a unity of text, interpersonal behaviour, and ideation." (Breen, 1984, p.161)

However, in order to bring language more closely to the front of this process requires what Long describes as a focus on *form* rather than a focus on *forms*.

It is probably best to start with what focus on form is *not*. What Long (2015), Ellis (2015) and others describe as "focus on forms" is what we might consider to be the traditional grammatically structured approach to lesson and course design, for example as presented in the Skills for Life ESOL teaching material, or indeed the vast majority of language textbooks. "The language is the object to be studied the forms are preselected… and grammar is taught explicitly and intentionally." (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, p.77)

In practice this means that linguistic items are explicitly taught to the students, practised in a controlled and then more open manner, before, it is hoped, being produced in a fluency-based activity. This is the widely known lesson plan model taught through many ELT teaching training qualifications: Presentation-Practice-Production (see Anderson (2017) for a clear description and historical review of the model's role in language teaching). Once the desired language item has been "produced" at the end of each lesson, or lessons, the syllabus then moves onto the next piece of language, and so on. Thus "forms" are covered and the course presses on. The form may be revisited or revised of course, but at that point it is considered to be covered, and all subsequent revisits are simply reviews of what is supposed to be known.

With focus on *form*, the learners' attention is drawn to linguistic problems in context, as they arise during communication, "thereby increasing the likelihood that attention to code features will be synchronised with the learner's internal syllabus, developmental stage and processing ability." (Long, 2015 p.27). Rather than simply being the thing to be studied, it is "a tool to

express meaning, and attention to grammar happens while communicating." (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, p.77) Thus, while the external syllabus of the course is based, for example on tasks (in TBLT), on conversation (as in dogme, see below), or on a process of problematising (as in participatory ESOL, see below), the attention to language is not lost, as it might be in a purely implicit model based on "natural" absorption of language such as that suggested by Krashen & Terrell (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

This approach allows for multiple linguistic items to be handled in a lesson, by briefly focussing on language as and when necessary in the lesson. This in-the-moment reactivity is essential. The learner is more likely to be vested in the communication, and therefore more motivated to learn. This increases the likelihood of their attending to the language form; because they are already aware of the meaning, they have freed up "attentional resources" (Long, 2015 p.28) and are therefore more likely to actively attend to, and notice (Batstone, 1996, Schmidt, 2010) the language.

This does not have to be simply corrective, either; this approach allows for opportunities to extend learner language, for example by reformulating and extending something which was already effective in communicating but making it better, or closer to a native-like form (cf. Meddings & Thornbury, 2009, Bryers, 2015).

Ellis (2016), while acknowledging that in focus-on-form, the "learners' attention is attracted to form–meaning mapping while they are engaged in an activity where the primary focus is on meaning," (p.410) also presents arguments that this could be linked to structured syllabus where learning tasks are presented which would indicate specific forms; thus if the syllabus required a focus on question forms, the task structure might be around carrying out an interview. The essential difference is that rather than tasks being chosen for meaning and communication, based on learners' needs, the tasks here are chosen because they fit the structured syllabus. While appearing to strike some sort of balance (cf. Willis, n.d.) this, however, does not resolve a key issue with a synthetic syllabus, namely that the syllabus and the course decide which language to focus on and in which sequence they should be covered. However, language which arises, for example, through tasks, is likely to reflect more accurately the processes of language learning, in that

> language learning is a developmental, organic process that follows its own internal agenda. Errors are not necessarily the result of bad

> learning but are part of the natural process of interlanguage forms gradually moving towards target forms.
>
> (Foster, 1999, p69.)

Interaction and Noticing

The TBLT model presents greater opportunities for interaction, which plays a crucial role in the development of language: as research by Dobinson (2001) showed, engagement in interaction, particularly where language items are focussed upon by the students does lead to learning language, similar to the studies cited by Barton & Pitt (2003) which highlight the importance of interaction as long as the students attend to the language involved in order for intake to occur. This is a process referred to as *noticing* (Batstone, 1996), that is "learners pick out specific features of the language and pay attention to them" (Hedge, 2000, p.146) Noticing here requires two processes – as Thornbury explains:

> 1. Learners must attend to linguistic features of the input that they are exposed to, without which input cannot become intake.
>
> 2. Learners must 'notice the gap', i.e. make comparisons between the current state of their linguistic system, as realized in their output, and the target language system, available as input
>
> (Thornbury, 1997, p.326)

In order for language items to be noticed, however, they must also be noticeable. It is therefore the teacher's role to develop noticing by "focusing their learners' attention on the targeted language in the input" (ibid.) and on the gap between their current interlanguage and the target language. "After items have been noticed and their relationship between form and meaning interpreted, these items become part of intake into the learning process." (Hedge, p.146)

However, the task is not the only organising principle available to us, and Long's theories, with the increasingly widely accepted focus on form make a solid theoretical basis, not to mention a practical tool, to support a range of other approaches, in particular *dogme* ELT and participatory approaches to ESOL, to which we shall now turn.

Dogme ELT

Dogme ELT is sometimes seen as being less of an approach to language teaching and instead more of a movement. It was stimulated by a surprisingly brief article by Scott Thornbury (1999) in which he criticises the reliance on published materials in international English language teaching. This was a remarkably prescient piece - since the turn of the century technologised language teaching has become the norm. Descriptions of innovation almost always include some reference to using or developing digital tools, which more often than not simply replicate the cognitive content of a paper-based handout or display (JISC, 2022). Indeed, one of the first actions of Skills for Life, once the curriculum had been developed, was to create a set of teaching materials, assessment resources, best practice guides and so on, supported by CD-ROMs, cassettes, and, eventually, online tools (ironically, the digital form of the AECC, announced in 2005 with much fanfare, has now been archived away from easy access).

For Thornbury, and later Meddings & Thornbury (2009) a dependence on resources and materials means that "real communication… is buried under an avalanche of photocopies, visual aids, transparencies, MTV clips and Cuisenaire rods." (Thornbury 1999). Instead, resources should come only from the students and the teacher, the *community* of the classroom, rather than being externally imposed, and if that material is not there, the class should go to where the material is. As well as removing the technology, or perhaps as a result of removing the technology, the focus then shifts from preplanned chunks of language, the "grammar mcnuggets" (Thornbury & Meddings, 2001) to real communication and communicative need. "Teaching - like talk - should centre on the local and relevant needs of the people in the room." (Thornbury, 1999. p.1) and the only language in the room should be that which is needed to engage in "real talk".

From this, then comes the crucial notion of *emergent language*, that is language which arises out of a need to communicate, and which is shared in the community of the classroom, rather than which is imposed externally. The only language which is learned is the language which is needed in the here-and-now of the classroom. Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) provide us with a clear definition:

> Unplanned language that is needed or produced by learners during meaning focussed interactions. This language is then explored through reformulation, clarification and support from the teacher.
>
> (ibid. p.7)

There were 3 core principles to *dogme* as it existed in the early part of the century, that language teaching should be

- conversation driven.
- materials light.
- focused on emergent language.

Over time, Thornbury and Meddings reworked and clarified dogme into something more structured, codified and developed not only an overarching set of principles and relatable structure, with a range of different activities presented in a 'recipe book' type framework (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

Work on emergent language has continued, for example in Gallen (2014), where he explored how vocabulary emerged during a short sequence of lessons, and how well that vocabulary was learned. This presented a nice counterpoint to Dellar & Walkley (2016) who argued that while "vocabulary can clearly be learnt consciously" (ibid. p.14) they suggest that a coursebook be the most effective method to do this. It is, of course, worth remembering that Dellar is also the author of a series of coursebooks following a lexical model of language teaching and learning (the *Outcomes* series, published by National Geographic Learning) The criticisms they present are not unreasonable. Much of the focus of writing around dogme ELT and emergent language tends to talk about grammar, whereas Dellar & Walkley view *all* language as vocabulary, and that splitting grammar and vocabulary into separate blocks is unproductive. However, there is nothing in the work on emergent language which precludes a focus on vocabulary, and indeed, many of the projects which have made use of a dogme, or at least emergent language approach (e.g. Gallen, 2014, Winstanley & Cooke, 2016; Chinn & Norrington-Davies, 2023) make reference to vocabulary development and emergent vocabulary being used.

That said, some of the criticisms perhaps would appear to hold water: there is little scope for explicit practice, for example, in a 'pure' dogme ELT because if we were following it truly dogmatically then the imposition of explicit practice of, say an emergent language point, would run counter to the notion of a fully conversation-based approach.

However, dogme, like so many forms of ELT, is an evolving paradigm, and one which developed through a community as part of a Yahoo! group. As such, it has plenty of space for adaptation and change, and provides a useful set of techniques and tools. It does present a challenge, and it is perhaps this which is its downfall in an international context: international English language teaching is an industry, and with that comes certain expectations from both companies and

their customers. Speaking against this marketised mainstream is deeply challenging, something which positions dogme ELT with a critical stance. As Thornbury (n.d.) describes it, dogme fits within a structure which seeks to challenge power in terms of the how, but falls slightly short of claiming that it is transformative. In order to place this into context, then, it is now necessary to explore precisely what I mean by "critical."

Critical and Participatory Pedagogies

While dogme occupied an approach based in the context of private language schools and the industrial-commercial approach to ELT, in an ESOL setting, the ultimate expression of a process curriculum, is, perhaps, the critical and participatory curriculum. Here, "the concerns and issues which affect students in their daily lives should be the driving force behind the curriculum." (Bryers, et al. 2014. p.11).

For the critical pedagogue, the role of education is to challenge and even upturn the status quo – Freire is highly critical of what he describes as a banking model of education which serves as a means of transmission of the status quo to the passive recipients, and describes the students he worked with as "marginals" who "need to be integrated into the health society" (Freire, 1970. p.54). Freire is critical of traditional literacy programmes, arguing that they view the learner as "a sort of 'sick man' for whom literacy would be the 'medicine,' to cure him, enabling him to return to the 'healthy' structure from which he has been separated." (Freire, 1994, p. 255). Like a kind of educational "white saviour" (e.g. Hinsliff, 2019), the educator becomes a benevolent evangelist whose role is "to restore [the learner] to the forsaken bosom of happiness by giving them the gift of the word." (ibid.). This medical model, with its more recent echoes in the language of the Skills for Life documentation discussed in chapter 1, presents the learner as a marginalised individual without power in their own rights, as we have seen, for example with students reflected in resources and exams as service users, rather than service providers. The role of the teacher is to diagnose the language need so that they can be brought into the full set of social and linguistic norms. However, instead of the teacher bringing these individuals "into" the structure, Freire argues for education as a direct political act to disrupt the society around them: "the solution is not to *integrate* them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so they can become beings for themselves." (Freire, 1970. p54). There is no other way than the "authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure." (Freire, 1994, p.255) This transformation begins in the social structures of the classroom where the lesson is "taught in dialogue with the students who in turn while being taught, also teach" (Freire, 1970, p.56). Education is a shared responsibility, for the benefit of all. Thornbury (2005) touches on this

when describing the teacher as the facilitator, provider of opportunities and feedback, but at the same "where the teacher is not very effective is in the role of *transmitter* of grammatical facts." (2005, p.57). Stenhouse also picks up on this altered role of the teacher, arguing that "he [sic] must cast himself in the role of a learner. Pedagogically this may in fact be a preferable role to that of the expert." (Stenhouse, 1975. p.91) Stenhouse does offer words of caution on this – "The teacher is not free to cast himself [sic] in the role of the learner without regard to the learning of his students for which he [sic] must accept responsibility." (ibid.p.91)

The question of content is also considered in Freire, for whom "liberating education consists of acts of cognition not in transferals of information." In order to stimulate these acts of cognition we need to develop a system focussed on "posing the problems of human beings" (ibid. p.60). For language teaching, as we have seen, this is perhaps more problematic. At some point there *does* need to be an explicit "transfer" of knowledge of and about language, but the *how* of this is more complex: because, as we have seen above, language does not seem to arise in formal sequence or neat stages, but in fits and starts, and where it *is* predictable, it is neither helpful nor realistic to follow that sequence (Thornbury, 2005, Ellis, 2006)."If grammar emerges and is self-organised," argues Thornbury, "then the teacher's attempts to force that process are likely to fall on deaf ears." (2005, p.57). Auerbach expands on this knowledge transmission model, critically reviewing it as an "ends-means" model of curriculum design: starting from an agreed body of knowledge, transmitted to the students and then tidily tested at the end, and this is used if not punitively then at least negatively:

> Teachers are evaluated in terms of how well they cover the syllabus. Students are evaluated in terms of gains between pretesting and post-testing. Great stress is placed on quantification of progress and objectivity of assessment.
>
> (Auerbach, 1992, p.12).

This critical pedagogy initiated by Freire is picked up and summarised by Ira Shor (1987) as a "nine-point programme." These nine points are echoed in a number of the subsequent and related literature on the theme of a participatory and critical approach to learning and in particular to language learning, and so offer a useful framework to reflect on the work of others.

For Shor, a critical pedagogy should be "**participatory**" (1987, p.84). This is where the students are "cognitively active" in their language use, working together with the teacher. This is "a dead serious way of learning… I want this participation to be reflective, not merely busy work." (ibid.) This notion of student participation as a key element of learning arises also in the findings of the

ESOL Effective Practice Project (Baynham, et al. 2007) which highlights that *all* language work in the classroom is focussed and is part of the learning process – "Talk is work in the ESOL classroom, but talk is also the means of creating social solidarity." (Baynham, et al. 2007, p.55) We will return to the notion of participation later.

Secondly Shor highlights the importance and value of being **critical.** This is based not only on the materials used, but also in the stances established by the students who "are not cast as passive recipients of official knowledge" (Shor, 1987, p.84.) but also as "critical actors who make meaning." (ibid.). The teacher's role here is to take the "impressions, opinions, myths and casual utterances and ask students to examine their deeper meanings." As with Freire, Shor refers to posing problems, although in his case these are not purely social but also academic, so that students focus on unfamiliar material. Critical meaning making can be seen elsewhere in the work of Elsa Auerbach, as we will see later, but is also seen in van Lier's ecological model:

> the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings. These meanings become available gradually as the learner acts and interacts within and with this environment. Learning is not a holus-bolus or piecemeal migration of meanings to the inside of the learner's head, but rather the development of increasingly effective ways of dealing with the world and its meanings.
>
> (Van Lier, 2000. p.246)

For Brian Morgan (1998), problem posing criticality is a response to the context of learning. He argues that teachers in a publicly funded sector are (unconsciously, perhaps) unaware of the ways in which curriculum processes are underpinned by an agenda made invisible by the institutions which organise that curriculum, supply funding and so on. As a result, "the curriculum is naturally perceived as neutral when other options and alternative perspectives are made invisible." (ibid. p.11). He is also critical of the way in which these systems frame the students and their role in the learning process – by appearing to provide (or perhaps deliver) a curriculum these "neutral" programmes "deflect responsibility back upon the presumed 'deficiencies' that the newcomers bring with them" (ibid.). The critical curriculum is founded upon a critical view of language which "is used to put people in their place and people use language to change the place they have been put." (ibid, p.12).

Shor's (1987) next argument is for language learning which is **situated** in the lives of the learners – moving away from the medical model of student-centredness criticised by Freire and towards a model of learner-centredness closer to meeting those criteria laid out by Schweisfurth (2015) where the course is "situated in the languages, statements, issues and knowledge students bring to class." (Shor, 1987, p.80). The things that the students bring to class are seen as the starting point "*not my ways of speaking about the world*" (Shor, 1987, p. 84. my italics.) Again, we see this shift of power and control away from the teacher and onto the students. This "situatedness" is a common theme in many descriptions of a critical, participatory approach, for example Akbari, argues that "C[ritical] P[edagogy] takes the 'local' as its point of departure, and local here includes the overall actual life experiences and needs of learners. Learners' needs in critical pedagogy are defined not just linguistically or in terms of tasks, but in terms of the purposes they serve in the social mobility and activism of students." (Akbari, 2008, p. 280). There are echoes here of Baynham et al. (2006) for whom "bringing the outside in" is a crucial aspect of the language classroom, although this offers an interesting counterpoint to Cogo et al. (2023) who argue that critical practitioners are attempting to also bring action from within the classroom to influence and take action on the outside world – bringing the inside out, perhaps. For Auerbach, "students are assumed to be the experts on their own reality, and very much involved in researching that reality with teachers." (Auerbach, 1992, p.19). For Auerbach, the students are involved throughout, with learning seen as a "collective process" (ibid.) which includes not just the creating the "what" of the course, but also contributing to the "how."

In order to do this, the classroom context should be **dialogic** – so that "students engage in critical inquiry together" (ibid, p.85) which for Shor brings the focus of language to the forefront: "Dialogue as a teaching method returns to the roots of human talk, our desire to learn about, talk about and act upon the world we are in, together." (ibid.) This links us back as well to the idea of language as a primarily communicative act, and the value of putting fluency and communication as the starting point of the learning process, rather than as the product (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009. p. 8). This is a theme raised by Auerbach as well, where the course content "emerges through the ongoing classroom interaction" (Auerbach, p. 19), focussing on both the what and the how of the learning.

The classroom, however, is also its own environment – the language *of the classroom* is also language of the students' lives. "Each classroom, and indeed each session, creates its own

environment and the relationships to that environment." (Baynham et al. 2007, p.55). Leo Van Lier (1996, 2000, 2010) describes this as an **ecological** approach to language learning.

> An ecological approach aims to look at the learning process, the actions and activities of teachers and learners, the multilayered nature of interaction and language use, in all their complexity and as a network of interdependencies among all the elements in the setting, not only at the social level, but also at the physical and symbolic level.
>
> (Van Lier, 2010, p.3)

In order to achieve this, it is therefore necessary that the learning context is both **desocialising** and **democratic –** encouraging students to move from passive recipients of the "agenda of negative values absorbed from mass culture" (Shor, 1987. p.85), and from being passive in the act of learning, and instead becoming active participants in their own lives and experiences, and with the teacher and students acting in concert. The classroom is crucial place for developing this active engagement, and in terms of the *curriculum,* the students have an equal role in its development. Morgan, while embracing this, also argues that "we shouldn't readily assume what is or isn't contentious in critical language work." (Morgan, 1998. p.15) – that is we cannot predict what may or may not be relatable or relevant for our students. Such an approach demands a focus on students' lives. "Students' experiences and expectations are central to the ongoing development and implementation of the syllabus." but also challenging those expectations and opinions – the teacher, and the teach*ing* are not apolitical or neutral after all – but also to use dialogue to "circulate probing questions and ideas in a thought-provoking manner that engages rather than threatens people and opens up possibilities." (ibid. p16) This requires an empowering educator who views the students as equals, and "resist[s] prescribing what empowerment is or should be for students and the community." (Morgan, 1998. p.17)

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly from the perspective of a critical pedagogy, a course should be **activist.** For Shor this is explicitly political activism, encouraging awareness and action in students through learning, although he is careful to note that "a course is not a rally or political meeting. It is a dialogue where the problem of acting on our knowledge can only be raised as a question." (Shor, 1987, p.87). Interestingly Shor describes how he brings in texts and selects texts for students to read based on this activist approach. This is perhaps more controversial, as there is a risk here that the teacher's personal political mindset may influence the texts chosen. For Morgan and for Auerbach this activism is less overtly political – Morgan,

for instance, describes lessons where the students prepared presentations for high school children on their experiences of the war in Iraq, while Auerbach describes students working on personal histories. These are not activist in the sense of challenging external power, but an activism which is more individual – promoting the individual, adding power to the status of the student, so that "making changes inside the classroom itself models a way of addressing and redefining roles outside the classroom." (Auerbach, 1992. P.22)

Indeed, this activist element of critical pedagogy is generally the most complex, as Sowden argues in his response to Akbari (2008a) "even a well-informed and conscientious teacher can be betrayed by their own prejudices and scope of experience, and why therefore it is dangerous for ordinary practitioners to lay claim to too much." (Sowden, 2008. p.287).

Sowden's criticism of critical pedagogies is valid for the contexts he describes – as he and Akbari (2008) both acknowledge, the students they are describing are from a socially and economically secure background – all members of the classroom community, teacher and students, are starting from a position of relative privilege. Arguably, of course, these are the key students who should be educated as to the imbalances in society, but this is a discussion for another thesis. And Sowden may have a point as regards the financially secure setting of privately funded EFL, where the in-class dynamic is not simply student and teacher but also has a sense of customer and service provider, and the social context beyond the classroom may well be more comfortable. In the case of ESOL, we are dealing with individuals who are already disenfranchised in some way, as migrants in a host society which is not, as I have already argued in chapter 1, always entirely welcoming. Allan Luke (2004) describes the subjects of Freire's original work in terms not entirely inappropriate for ESOL learners in 21st century Britain: "economically and politically disenfranchised, physically battered, psychically and spiritually violated, and marginalised." (Luke, 2004, p.23) and the modern learner of English in a migrant setting as "objects of colonial and imperial power or diasporic subjects living at the economic margins of Western and Northern cultures and economies." (ibid. p.25).

Participatory ESOL – Auerbach and beyond

Elsa Auerbach headed up a project in the late 1980s making use of Freire's concepts of participatory education in an adult second language learning context. The experiences and findings of this project were summarised in her book *Making Meaning, Making Change* which summarised and evaluated the impact of a family learning ESOL programme in Boston, USA.

The book is simultaneously a guide to the practical tools used, and the thinking behind such an approach.

She draws a distinction in curriculum between her own approach and more traditional "ends-means" models of curriculum design. She argues for a curriculum which is "context specific, grounded in the particular realities of each group of participants, and based on a collaborative investigation of critical issues in family and community life." (Auerbach, 1992. p.9) The curriculum develops through the exploration of issues of interest and concern to the students and then transforming these issues into content. In this way, the language learning can become "a tool for making change in the conditions of students' lives." (ibid.) Thus education leads to the improvement of students' lives through engagement *with* those lives. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the social context of the learning situation.

She compares a more traditional "ends-means" model of curriculum design with a participatory approach and provides a critical commentary on elements of the traditional model, identifying how teaching towards this structure removes agency and power from the students themselves.

It is important to note, before contrasting these two models, that Auerbach herself very clearly presents these as ends of a continuum, and that teachers often draw on both of these approaches. This is certainly crucial to bear in mind and reflects some of the processes explored in the final project. (All references from Auerbach, 1992).

Ends-Means Model	**Participatory Approach**
Curriculum Development	
• Standards and competencies are developed by experts in consultation with mainstream society (e.g. educators, policy leaders, employers) • based on what mainstream society expects or needs from the students • Does not involve students or learners in the process – the curriculum is delivered at the students, rather than developed with	• involves students at every stage – "from the students to the curriculum" (p.19) • "Students are…experts in their own reality and research that reality in collaboration with their teachers" (ibid.) • "Participants share and analyse experiences together in order to address concerns"(ibid.) • Students involved in the *what* and the *how* of learning

• Direction of instruction is "from the curriculum to the students" (p.19)	• Enabling students to resolve issues without relying on outside experts
Content	
• Takes the standards and breaks these down into measurable elements organised by form, grammar, function, etc. • syllabus is pre-planned based on the standards, • Teacher and/or organisations select and sequence content • often highly detailed in response to accountability and performance management measures	• Develops from the social context of the students and from the immediate context of the classroom, emerging from classroom interaction • Choices about content made collaboratively • syllabus is a retroactive account of what has happened • exploits and builds upon "teachable moments" (p.13) • Pre-planning is focussed on *how* the learning will happen, rather than *what* will be learned.
Needs Assessment	
• carried out before instruction begins • used to determine what students lack when measured against the standards • "considers any teaching not related to these points to be deviations that don't count" (p.12)	• an ongoing process, carried out in the moment • focussed on students collaborating alongside the teacher • used to inform continual changes to the curriculum, not just progress to a goal • engages students in learning about their environments in order to enact change
Classroom Roles & Learning	
• Teacher as transmitter, student as recipient • Learning is the acquisition of skills and knowledge	• Learning is a collective, collaborative process • The teacher is a poser of problems (cf. Freire, 1970) who provides structures to

• Learning is individual, sequenced and assisted by the teacher • Classroom learning should always be directed at working towards the standards	help draw out issues and make use of these • Teacher creates an environment of trust to ensure students feel comfortable challenging contexts and asking questions • Students and teachers are experts on their respective realities, and so are mutually learning about those realities
Outcomes	
• Performance is evaluated objectively against the standards • For the teacher, in terms of how well the syllabus has been covered • For the student, the gains made between pre-testing and post-testing • Predictability is valued, sometimes to the extent that student selection is based on how effectively they will achieve the outcomes	• Cannot be predicted, and the unpredictability is valued • subjective evidence of progress is equally valued • involves the students in the evaluation of the *affective* factors – the extent to which students are gaining control of their own lives • "Progress is cumulative and cyclical and does not occur in neat, linear steps" (p.21) • Acknowledges the reality that language learning is a long-term action and cannot be broken down into tidy elements.

Table 2: A Summary of Auerbach's comparison of curriculum approaches (1992)

For Auerbach, then, the move to a participatory approach represents how the learning process is done with teacher and students working in concert as a single community. The teacher has knowledge and skills of language and language learning, of course, but employs these to facilitate exploration of the learners own realities, rather than imposing the reality of the teacher or that of the dominant social structures onto the students. Certainly, students may need to examine and move into some of those structures (for example in further study or in the workplace) but this is done by adding those structures to their pre-existing social structures, but *not* replacing them. In terms of migrant language education, this is integration seen not as a motorway, where the students' lives are forced into the mainstream flow of social traffic, but

integration as complex and interactive process: less a motorway than a *spaghetti junction* – "a complicated, dense set of intersections, crossroads and junctions going in lots of different directions." (Bryers, et al. 2014. p.31)

Auerbach goes on in her book to explore the development of a course, and of materials and classroom activities. Central to these is the Freirean notion of *codes*. Put simply, a *code* is a resource which presents an issue in a concrete and accessible form, accompanied by questions which help to analyse the issue. Codes provide a direct link from Freire to Auerbach, as well as mentioned by Shor (1987) then onto Morgan (1998), the *Reflect for ESOL* project (Cardiff, et al. 2007, Sunderland & Moon, 2008), to Bryers, et al. (2014, 2018)

In Freire, as we have seen, these are simply images to stimulate discussion, but in subsequent writers on participatory and critical approaches, these can also be verbal (a dialogue or text, for example). In a more modern context a code could also be multimedia – Bryers et al. (2014) describe the use of social media to develop language and stimulate discussion. In this, students responded to significant messages using Twitter, discussing the issues and planning a response. In Cardiff et al., (2007) the codes are similarly multi-modal, incorporating images (body outlines, area maps, matrices, visual metaphors like trees and rivers) and words (labels, descriptions, etc.).

Auerbach presents a useful set of guidelines for codes (1992, p.70), adapted and clarified by Bryers, et al. in 2018 into a series of questions which make clear how a code and generative theme can be led through into a specific classroom procedure.

1. Describe the content – what do you see?
2. Define the problem – what exactly is the problem here?
3. Personalise the problem – has anyone experienced this?
4. Analyse the problem – what are the causes and consequences of the problem?
5. Solutions – what can we do about this?

By posing these questions and linking these to the students' experiences, language arises and is added to the students' linguistic repertoires.

Auerbach's work informed the ActionAid Reflect for ESOL project, (Cardiff et al. 2007) which outlines a range of visual tools for students to explore problems and issues collaboratively. These include such visual metaphors as the problem tree (to analyse the causes and potential outcomes of a particular situation), a river (to show timelines and events) or "chapati diagrams"

(using circles to show interrelationships). By working together on the visual metaphors, the students engage in discussion and create a genuine need for language use which links directly to their own lives. Pauline Moon and Helen Sutherland reviewed and evaluated these approaches in 2008 and found that the students valued the opportunities to bring their lives and experiences into the classroom, during which time they were able to take "the initiative to raise issues that they want to discuss with others." (Moon & Sutherland, 2008, p.23). Following on from this it was found that learners then felt able to bring issues from outside into the classroom space. This has echoes with the research study carried out at the same time by the National Research & Development Centre for Literacy & Numeracy (NRDC) subsequently published as the ESOL Effective Practice Project (Baynham et al. 2008) which found that "bringing the outside in" was valued by both teachers and students in the classroom, and considered it to be a strong motivating factor for students, and "one of the most effective ways of encouraging extended output and managing different types of talk" (Baynham, et al. p.60). They also found that these personalising actions, linking language being learned with the students' lived experiences, occurred naturally following more decontextualized or impersonal language practice. This suggests again that students are keen to make the connections between the language being learned and the contexts in which they need to use it. "There is constant movement from the grammatical form to more personal narrative and opinion." Students, in short, *want* to express themselves, and need only the tools and opportunities to do it: "Just because learners have limited English does not mean they have limited, parochial minds." (ibid. p.61). This research informed the subsequent Practitioner Guide (Cooke & Roberts, 2007) which further highlights the value of emergent language contextualised to the students' needs.

Freire and Auerbach also underpin the work of English for Action (EfA London). This organisation, led by Dermot Bryers, has worked extensively on developing a participatory pedagogy for a modern age. Much of their work has been documented widely, for example in Bryers, et al. 2013, 2014, Bryers, 2015, Cooke, et al. 2018, Winstanley, et al., 2016, Cooke et al.2023) and looked into different aspects of the approach as it related to students as users of a suite of languages, using participatory methods to explore students language practices (Cooke et al. 2018), the notion of emergent language in a participatory setting (Winstanley et al, 2016). To capture the scope of the work over the last decade or so is an enormous task, but the most recent publication, *Participatory ESOL: Taking Stock* (Cooke, et al, 2023) provides a useful overview of the work to date and is bookended neatly by Bryers' 2015 article for Language Issues entitled *Participatory ESOL*.

In this setting participatory ESOL has become much more focussed on the day to day practicalities of making it work while still clearly underpinned by the ethical and social justice elements of critical pedagogy. Bryers (2015) summarises the approach neatly. ESOL students "are considered as users and not just learners of the language." (ibid., p.55); to reappropriate Long's (2015) metaphor, English is but one shiny arrow in their linguistic quiver. Students other language skills are acknowledged and made use of as part of a process of making meaning.

This meaning making is a much more mutual approach, where students and teachers are engaged in a mutual enterprise of developing language, during which the teacher themselves may develop a greater understanding of English. This co-construction requires a repositioning of the role of the teacher, and Bryers reminds us that "hierarchy and inequalities of power and privilege cannot be magicked away." (Bryers, 2015. p55). So while there is a shift, the movement is not so much the teacher abrogating power, but rather towards acknowledging that power and using it more responsively. This is enacted through "active listening" to find out what students concerns are, and acting on those.

Taking this into the classroom, as EfA have done, it settles into 3 clear stages outlined most clearly in Bryers, et al. (2013) centred around developing language based on themes and topics identified through this active listening.

Making meaning. This is an initial exploration of the topic, using visual metaphorical tools such as images and diagrams, to identify the issues and the students' interests in those issues.

Going Deeper. This is where tools are used to explore in much more detail, using *problematising* as a means of examining the social underpinnings of the issues. Again, visual metaphors are used to examine these, for example the problem tree (Cardiff, et al. 2007).

Broadening Out. This is where the class community look beyond the classroom, for example in the form of external texts, or external speakers. If they desire, the class may choose at this point to take some form of action. As noted already, this is an approach rooted in community organising, with an intention towards positive action and change, with the language emerging alongside the action-making of the class.

Language, and a language curriculum, emerges from these processes, dependent as they are on student talk. The teacher then follows this up "with an explicit focus on any useful, innovatory or impressive language the students used, or any gaps in language knowledge or competency emerging from the discussion." (Bryers, et al. 2013. p.13). An important takeaway,

and one which is easily forgotten is that this forefronts the positive: *useful, innovatory or impressive* language is to be considered as well as filling in the gaps. Rather than highlighting the communicative deficit, as perhaps, as language teachers we are conditioned through training, habit, and policy language, this emphasises what the classroom interaction has yielded in terms of new language and celebrates what students can do.

The language emergence is a key element emphasised by Winstanley & Cooke (2016, Paper 3) who examined it alongside two other elements of the "emerging worlds" of an ESOL course (emerging topics and emerging action). Language linked closely to both the content of the interactions and to the processes involved in the interactions. "Discussion Circles" for instance, led to discourse strategies and the linguistic tools to achieve those (e.g. interrupting, requesting clarification), and an exploration of changes in college led to work on *used to*, while a lesson on funding cuts to ESOL led to work around conditionals. As the authors observe, there is an interconnectivity between the development and analysis of ideas and issues and successful language development." (ibid. p.14). They found that the focus moved from the sentence level grammar which usually dominates the curriculum (tenses, discourse markers, clause types) to a much broader scope of discourse level (discussion, texts) analysis. It is interesting, however, that while vocabulary is noted, it is less evident, which perhaps is indicative again of teacher habit.

As an interesting aside to this project, at around the same time and in the same setting (Tower Hamlets College in London), Richard Gallen was exploring making use of emergent language in ESOL, and over the course of several lessons, explored how and what language emerged. This project was highly detailed and approached emergent language as an aspect of the tangents, much as Norrington-Davies (2020) does but suggests that "perhaps we should worry less about whether the student is using the right form but instead focus on the collocations and patterns that go with the verb." (Gallen, 2014. p. 12). Examined, then, on a more micro level, the importance of lexis is increased, and it seems an interesting omission from much discussion around emergent language, especially in an ESOL context.

Imperilling the richness - Learning outcomes, opportunities and affordances

The challenge that remains from Task Based Language Teaching, Dogme ELT and Critical and Participatory Approaches is the notion of *what* has been learned - instead of an emphasis on *what will* we instead focus on *what has been learned* and more importantly what has been

gained from the interactions. As we have explored already, the traditional learning objective or outcome, with the emphasis on the observable and measurable, is problematic when using an approach which favours language which arises from learner need in meaning focussed communication. However, for motivational benefits and for the purposes of auditable documentation, there is a need for *something* to be recorded, even if it is a retrospective account.

Allwright (2005) presents us with a historical overview of the notion of the teaching point (or learning outcome, or objective, or intention, depending on the date and/or origin of the guidance) in ELT. Like many aspects in "modern" education, it goes back to the 1970s and early 80s, but has not moved on in some time: indeed, although the article is itself 20 years old, the criticism that "mainstream textbooks… still revolve around the basic idea that units should consist of particular things, quite narrowly conceived, to be taught in a particular order, in particular lessons" (Allwright, 2005, p.11) remains current and easily applicable not only to the ELT textbooks but also to ESOL syllabus design in the UK FE sector. Allwright observed, during research into lessons, that the focus on teaching points was not only inefficient in itself; it also seemed to hinder teachers and learners from making the most of opportunities to have really productive, though previously unplanned, episodes of teaching and learning." (Allwright, 2005, p.14). Allwright describes this as "imperilling the potential richness of the overall experience" (ibid.) which most neatly summarises his overall stance.

Instead, Allwright's suggestion is that we "abandon the notion that the point of planning is to determine everything that is taught so that we can measure the learners' learning purely in terms of what we were trying to teach." (ibid.) To do this, he suggests a new unit of analysis - the learning opportunity based on three criteria. The first of these is agency - essentially these need to make space for learner contribution to lessons, both individually and collectively. The second is scope which needs to be flexible enough to cover both "small" individual queries and larger, overarching motivations. The final criterion is that it must avoid the cause and effect notion of the learning outcome, that is, it should acknowledge the observed reality of teaching that the relationship between input (what is "taught") and uptake (what is learned) is not simply definable as cause and effect (cf. Long, 2015, Lightbown & Spada, 2005, Ellis, 2015).

Van Lier approaches the classroom experience from an *ecological* perspective. For Van Lier, (1996, 2000, 2004) language learning is more than simply information being taken in and processed, as we have seen above. Instead, emergence is valued, with cognition being an internal process activated or developed though external interactions- that learners do not

simply passively absorb but develop language through interaction with one another and with wider events and activities. In this setting, "the learner is immersed in an environment full of potential meanings [which] become available gradually as the learner acts and interacts *within and with this environment.*" (Van Lier, 2000. p.246. [my italics]). This ecological interaction makes way for further action, that is, creating *affordances* which the learner can perceive and make use of (ibid, p.252). These are activities, discussions, interactions with texts and so on, which offer potential for meaning making (Van Lier, 2004); as with Allwright, and echoes in Anderson (2015) the process of planning moves from identifying the input to creating affordances from which learning opportunities arise, in turn giving rise to emergent language, which can then be captured and recorded. Anderson (2015) suggests how this might function within the relatively confined space of the teacher training lesson plan, including where the teacher thinks about what *might* arise from the activities. He also suggests a framing for the learning opportunities which could be applied in a lesson plan which could be appropriated for a teacher wishing to meet the audit demands of the scheme of work and lesson plan (Anderson, 2015, p.233).

Emergence, Participation and Community

One thing which unites critical pedagogy, participatory ESOL and dogme ELT is the notion of the classroom as a valid and living community in and of itself.

Auerbach (1992), for instance, sees language learning and language knowledge as a mutable and variable thing, constructed in collaboration and discussion with students, and emerging from the developing language needs of the classroom in response to their wider needs. The classroom, is also a part of these wider needs and contexts, and is a social space in and of itself (Van Lier, 1996) which is not necessarily separate from the wider social settings that the students work in. This is reflected in Bryers at al, (2013) where: "the class is regarded as a community in its own right. This means that what happens in the classroom is not regarded as a mere rehearsal for the outside world but as a place where meanings are built and shared and gain specific importance in the group itself."(ibid, p. 14)

The importance of the classroom as a community of practice (Wenger, 1993) is critical here: the ESOL classroom captures exactly what a community of practice should be: dedicated to a shared enterprise, with all the participants contributing to that enterprise. While it is imposed by external structures such as the college or the organisation, the members are a unique coming together of individuals with shared challenges and shared intentions.

Many of these explorations of participatory approaches and emergent language occur either over shorter periods or are carried out in small or independent organisations. Much of the work done by Bryers, Winstanley and Cooke, for example, are shorter, 6-8 week courses, with only one group in a college setting. Auerbach also was writing guidance for an organisation seated outside the mainstream – indeed, there is an excellent and informative chapter which describes the more practical organisational elements of running a course in this way, with advice for teacher development. Brian Morgan's work is based in a charity in Canada and Freire himself, at least in the early stages of his work, was working with some degree of autonomy from the government of the time, with his later work being developed in opposition to the demands and expectations of government. Gallen (2014) examines only a short sequence of lessons, while Norrington-Davies (2020) and (to a lesser extent) Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) tend to favour emergent language and participation as an aside, rather than using it as an organising feature of a course.

This is not intended as criticism of those projects, but rather acknowledging their limitations. As described in chapter 1, the context of this research is situated in a general FE college, against a background of financial restrictions leading to a more conservative, unchallenging pedagogy. Accountability is high, and "evidence" remains a watchword: if you have no evidence of learning, how do you know learning happened? The role of externally set exams retains an influence over content, and institutionally specific decisions, such as the presence of non-ESOL qualifications embedded into the course place inevitable restrictions and barriers on following such an approach. This is, of course, before we even begin to consider what the students are bringing to the classroom in terms of their expectations about teacher and student roles. Certainly, students in a high level ESOL class in a general FE college with many years of experience of being students in that college may well come to have a much more active understanding of what they should be entitled to.

A Responsive, Emergent Curriculum?

For the remainder of this chapter, I will lay out, in broad terms, the general pedagogical principles which informed the teaching during the curriculum process. At the beginning of the course, the curriculum processes were very loosely drawn - but the intention was to draw on the influences primarily of dogme ELT, participatory pedagogy, and the broad underlying principles of communicative language teaching (Ellis, 1982; Richards & Rogers, 2001) which emphasises the role of language for communication, with an intention to achieve communicative competence, a larger concept than simply gaining linguistic knowledge.

Williams (1979) presented 4 criteria which need to be achieved in order to achieve communicative competence, and these provide useful overarching intentions for the course, without necessarily committing to specific linguistic items.

- mechanical rules of language, answering the question 'Is the utterance well-formed?';
- meaningful rules of language, which relate the utterance to the outside world and answer the question 'Has the speaker said what he [sic] means?';
- appropriacy in terms of the setting and the relationship between the people involved, answering the questions 'Has the speaker used suitable words and delivered them in a suitable way? Should the speaker in fact have said anything?
- non-linguistic conventions concerning position, gesture, eye-movement, facial expression, etc. answering the question ‘Is the speaker using suitable position and movement?’

(Williams, 1979; p. 19)

These overarching elements serve usefully as the underpinning, generalised what of a language course, but without dictating specific rules or language items.

While Williams is referring to speaking, these criteria could be equally well applied to written language with a small amount of rephrasing. They don’t, however, cover receptive skills, but these could be left wider open to the social interpretation of texts, and the uses of text as they might occur in the real world.

Principles and Politics

I entered the project with several broad principles, and an overriding intention to develop the communicative competence of the students. Lessons would start with topics, themes, discussions or images, and the course syllabus and subsequent content would develop from there. There was to be no plan of intended learning outcomes, but rather a sequence of lesson activities from which language would emerge and the syllabus created. We have already discussed the role and value of emergent language and identified sources for such language, based on principles laid out in participatory ESOL (Bryers, 2013) and in dogme ELT (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). The model was less politically and activist driven than the activities described in many critical or participatory projects (e.g. Norton, et al., 2004, Morgan, 2002, Auerbach, 1992, Freire, 1970), the methods used were drawn from these and similar resources, such as the Reflect for ESOL resource pack (Cardiff, et al. 2008). At the same time, the stance was not

apolitical because teaching ESOL in the UK in the first quarter of the 21st century is not apolitical - the students, as we have seen, come from politically and socially complex backgrounds. Meddings & Thornbury tread this balance well, but still veer towards the apolitical (perhaps inevitable given their target audience for the publication). More recently, and published after the work of the project had been completed, Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) appear to aim for an entirely apolitical approach, although do describe the uses of emergent language in more politically loaded contexts.

Broadly speaking, then, going into the period being researched, I started from the following conceptual "rules".

- There would be no learning outcomes declared in advance. All language would be emergent, rather than preplanned.
- Planning would focus on developing activities, tasks and texts.
- External texts would include whatever text was felt to be appropriate. While authentic texts would be desirable, "inauthentic" texts such as those developed for learning purposes could be used if no other text presented itself.
- If a natural opportunity arose, for example, a discussion or class question, this would be seen as a chance to expand and grow into as much or as little of a lesson as felt right.
- Students would be encouraged to ask questions, contribute ideas, make suggestions and supply texts.
- Students would be involved in the planning and the development of the course, including themes, topics and language. I would also take from them any requests for specific content or lessons, which could include "traditional" focus-on-forms lessons (Long, 2015).
- My role was to remain as the teacher, and to guide the processes, but not to dictate which language items would be covered until the opportunity arose in the lesson.
- The demands of the exam boards and the institution would be built into the programme, and could not be ignored.

As is apparent, the initial principles were relatively rough and ready to start with: a set of informed ideas in search of a structure. By addressing the following research questions in this project, I intended to clarify and refine these principles:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?
- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

In the next chapters we will explore the methods I used to explore these questions, before then describing the outcomes of that research with a view to establishing a refined and more clearly defined set of curriculum processes.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

> As men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water.
>
> H G Wells, The War of the Worlds

Introduction

Chapter One reviewed the challenges of ESOL practice in the current climate, in particular that of ESOL learning in an environment which values *evidence* of performance over the *act* of performance. This is a culture which is audit heavy and highly demanding in terms of record keeping, with close controls on curriculum processes. It challenged the notion that the Skills for Life "Learning Journey" (DfES, 2001e) is not as learner centred as it would claim to be, and in Chapter 2, I evaluated this against definitions of learner centredness and found it lacking. I also presented an overview of curriculum design processes and identified issues with the product based, ends-means model (Auerbach, 1992). This traditional outcomes-led approach requires high levels of teacher and organisational control and I have argued that this pays lip service to notions of learner agency. Instead, this research sets out to develop and apply an alternative which responds more in line with the students and their changing and developing needs.

I proposed a curriculum approach based on Stenhouse (1975)'s definition of a process curriculum, using strategies and techniques drawn from dogme ELT (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009), participatory ESOL (Cooke, et al. 2023) and from task-based language teaching (Long, 2015). I wanted to explore how a course would develop based on this, the impact of that course on the students and the course content, and the barriers which arose in the process.

This chapter sets out the methodological framework used in the research. First we will examine the alternatives, in particular the larger paradigmatic distinctions between ontological and epistemological standpoints, before identifying and justifying the specific approach used in this research – a case study.

We will start by returning to the research questions, which were as follows:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?

- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

In order to review these questions, and the impact of the process curriculum, it was necessary to identify an approach which aligned with the nature of that being studied. In this case, the specific practises of a teacher and his class. So that this is possible, it is important to explain as much *why not* just as much as it is important to explain *why*.

There are two major paradigms which occur in descriptions of approaches to research (Coe, 2021, Cohen et al., 2007, Taber, 2013, Hammersley, 2012), representing different views of both what knowledge is (ontology) and how it can be understood (epistemology), often described as *positivist* and *interpretivist*. *Critical* is also sometimes added as a third category, although, as I will argue later, this shares many elements with interpretivism. As is common in such debates, these are usually presented as distinct either/or options. Coe (2017) describes this as "incommensurability" where "a philosophical commitment to a particular way of seeing the world necessarily implies the adoption of certain approaches and the adoption of others"(Coe, 2021. p.7). There are issues with this distinction: where results from two studies using different paradigms conflict, it becomes impossible to compare the relative merits of those results. While it may be possible to combine the approaches, this can be problematic, and may more likely be a "soft" positivism, it is likely to be more useful to take a pragmatic approach. This is the notion not only that you *can* pick and mix according to what fits the subject of the study, for example in mixed methods approaches. A study may have elements which lie somewhere between the two extremes (Taber, 2013, p. 114). Coe (2021) cites Biesta as challenging the very notion of research paradigms.

The reasons for the research are influenced by the beliefs and values of the researchers. The questions being asked in the research stem from those beliefs, and these questions, in turn, influence the nature of the methodology. Slavish adherence to one view or another is unhelpful: fundamentalism is rarely a productive or useful force, more often leading to division than insight. However, before we can reject or accept either of these stances, it is useful to examine what we are accepting or rejecting.

Positivism

By positivism here, I refer to the ontological notion that there is a world of understanding which "exists independently of others" (Usher, 1996, p.12). A positivist epistemology assumes that "it is possible to produce definitive knowledge that is objective" (Taber, 2013, p.45). In this, the data from any given research is seen to be generalisable, in the sense that it takes assumptions from the specific (i.e., that being studied) and creates rules or observations which can then be applied to all such similar situations. It is an approach commonly linked to physical sciences, where a hypothesis can be proposed, tested, and then proven (or not) leading to a general theory. Typical of such an approach is the laboratory experiment and the randomised control trial. This latter has been summarised and applied to an education context by Ben Goldacre (2013) in his publication for the Department for Education – *Building Evidence into Education*.

> We simply take a group of children, or schools (or patients, or people); we split them into two groups at random; we give one intervention to one group, and the other intervention to the other group; then we measure how each group is doing, to see if one intervention achieved its supposed outcome any better.
>
> (Goldacre, 2013, p.8)

Such an approach might appear to be common sense – after all, as Goldacre himself argues, this approach is popular in medicine, where variables are carefully accounted for in the process of the research. However, the RCT is problematic in education. There is an ethical concern of treating one group of people so very differently to others, and thus potentially and actively disadvantaging those people, and whether those individuals are capable of opting in or out of that research (Hammersley, 2021, in Coe, 2021, p. 59). More importantly, for the time being at least, is also the challenge that such a method and therefore its epistemological and ontological underpinnings are essentially reductive and fail to acknowledge the profound complexity of that being studied. Such an experiment may take into account *some* variables but is unlikely to take into account *all* the relevant variables, and even if we could produce some form of objectively measurable experiment on a group of students, it would be unlikely to be applicable to "ongoing, emerging, interactive, relational changing, open situations" (Cohen, 2007. p277). This description is highly applicable to a classroom environment, which is complex on multiple levels, reliant not only the complexities of an individual but also on the interactions and networks of multiple individuals (Cohen, 2007, Usher, 1996).

There are further challenges with employing such an approach as linked to the specifics of *this* research. A positivist ideal is that the researcher and that being researched are independent of one another. However, this is *practitioner* research, and in particular an investigation into my own practices as a teacher, and as such it is impossible for me to sit outside as an objective observer. Even if I were to aspire to produce an empirically verifiable experiment, this would be virtually impossible to achieve due to the imposition of my own subjectivity on the process. This does raise questions of consent on the part of all participants, however, a point to which I will return later in the discussion on ethics.

Interpretivism

One of the cornerstones of this research, and indeed at the centre of my own beliefs and values in classroom practice is that language learning is an *interactional* process. It requires human interaction, between students, and between students and teacher with communication being an essential element of the process (e.g. Long, 2015, Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Language learning itself is not a predictable process. Students do not always, if ever, learn what is 'delivered' by the teacher (e.g. Lightbown and Spada, 2014), or while they may appear to have *got* something in one lesson, the next lesson the same issue appears again (Long, 2015). This implies a very specific type of social reality of interactivity and collaboration, not tidy linguistic *mcnuggets* whose consumption and reproduction can be clearly monitored and managed (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). The very subject of the study is essentially unpredictable, reliant as it is on the human interactions, and the infinite possibilities of language which can be generated from those, co-constructed by its participants. In this case, the social universe of the ESOL classroom and the ways in which the people in that class, students, and teacher, co-create that world through their interactions, and correspondingly how this social universe gives rise to the curriculum. This is a social reality which defies objective measurement because the range of variables at play in an emergent, process curriculum, is enormous. Figure 1 suggests a handful of these, and already with a group of 15-20 students, the potential themes emerging are vast.

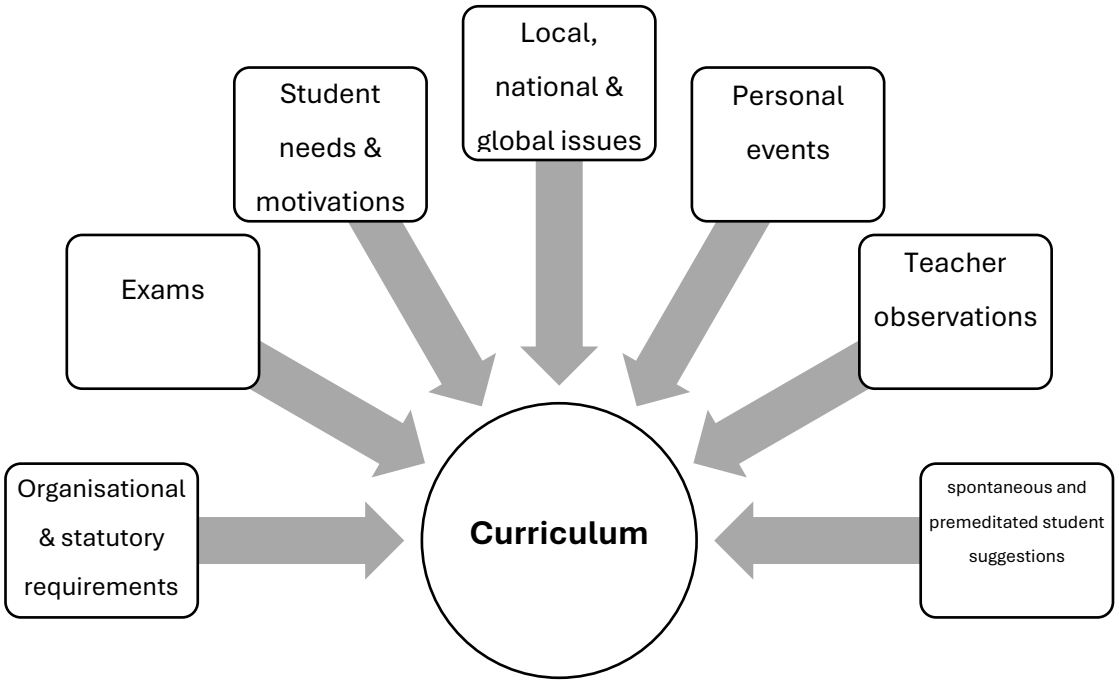


Figure 1 Influences on an ESOL Curriculum

If positivism is lacking in accounting for this socially emergent phenomenon, what can exist as an alternative? Interpretivism is usually presented as the most obvious alternative to positivism, and takes the ontological stance that social reality is entirely influenced by those participating within it, constructed through and by the participants within it. Hammersley (2012) contrasts it with positivism: "People – unlike atoms, chemicals, or even most non-human forms of life – interpret or give meaning and value to their environment and themselves" (Hammersley, 2012. p.22), while Waring (2021) expands on this, and takes this further, arguing that in this perspective "the knower and the process of knowing cannot be separated from what is known." (Waring, 2012. p.18). There is also the acknowledgement of the culture and the social world around it, and in this view that "norms and values exist but as shifting organic elements of social life. They are used and changed by people as they interpret and respond to events." (Burton & Bartlett, 2005. p.22). This argues for a much closer link between ontology and epistemology – because that which is known is founded inherently in the way in which that knowing is uncovered, to attempt to untangle these is challenging, and I would argue unhelpful given that the research "product" is itself an ongoing and interactive development. The educational context, as I have already argued above, is not one to be neatly pinned down. The complexities of interaction in the classroom and the learning which emerges from those interactions cannot be so easily predicted – indeed, the whole focus of this research project, the notion of the emergent, process curriculum, is founded upon that very idea.

Interpretivism is not without criticism, of course. The main criticism comes from the notion that the knowledge created from the study remains deeply contextualised. Cohen et al. (2007) describe it thus: "there is a risk to interpretive approaches that they become hermetically sealed from the world outside the participants' theatre of activity." (p.26), i.e. that such a piece of research cannot be applied beyond that context, and that it fails to provide any wider applicability or *generalisability*; something which Hammersley argues is "essential in social science" (ibid. p.23). However, this is a piece of *practitioner* research – an investigation into the specific practices of an individual and their context. However, even a positivistic study of such a context, if it were possible, would remain too small scale from which to be able to draw any wider conclusions anyway and would need wider corroboration before making any grand statements.

Critical

This focus on *change*, in particular the process of change in a context of complex power interactions, leads us to a third paradigm with which to frame the research – critical theory. While ontologically similar to interpretivism, in that it sees knowledge as something co-constructed and contextualised, it shifts the focus to include, evaluate and challenge the power relationships involved in that co-construction. From a critical perspective, both positivism and interpretivism "offer incomplete accounts of social behaviour by their neglect of the political and ideological contexts of much educational research" (Cohen, et al. 2007. p. 26). Critical Theory was developed in the mid-20th century by several German philosophers (Max Horkheimer, Jürgen Habermas, and others) of the Frankfurt School, characterised by a focus on challenging the status quo:

> it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation. (Bohman, 2021)

It has given rise to a range of critical approaches in both education, including Freire (1972) and in linguistics, through critical applied linguistics (CALx), itself encompassing both the understanding of language through critical discourse analysis and critical approaches to language education (Pennycook, 2006) and is "about making applied linguistics more politically accountable." (Pennycook, 2006. p.798).

Central to a critical approach to research is that it should be *emancipatory* – that is "geared to abolishing particular kinds of social division" (Hammersley, 2012. p. 25) by enabling and

empowering those involved in the research. Where positivism and interpretivism both *accept* the reality being evaluated, research from a critical perspective not only challenges and questions the power relationships, but also seeks to re-empower those disadvantaged by those relationships (Cohen et al. 2007).

Another crucial element of a critical approach to research is the notion of *praxis,* defined by Freire as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1972, p. 52). This is not simply the reflection on and analysis of practice as an educator but also taking that analysis and acting upon it. In this context, a practitioner-research project which involves the practices of both the researcher-teacher and the students, what is learned through the research is likely to influence subsequent action and development of the course, and so lead to a cyclical development.

A critical paradigm is itself not impervious to critique, and neither should it be. Indeed, some of the issues raised here have parallels in all aspects of critical theory, including both critical pedagogy and critical applied linguistics. Key amongst these is the notion that a critical or emancipatory researcher is already imposing their own political stances onto that being researched. With simple numerical data, and interpreting this data, a political stance *may* lead to a particular interpretation of that data – but with *qualitative* data, where inference and the analysis (see below) of that data is crucial there is an even greater likelihood of subjective interpretation. An imposition of the researcher's political stance onto the data being researched is similar to some of the findings of this research – where the participatory, critical pedagogy being applied to lessons may be pushing towards a specific political agenda (emancipation, challenge to power) it may meet barriers in the form of the students themselves. If a curriculum is focussed on identifying and working with student opinions and student voice, then to what extent is the teacher betraying that intention by imposing their political agenda on the students (Akbari, 2008; Sowden, 2008)?

That said, while this research started in this political agenda for the *students*, it became also about my own practices, in particular critically questioning specific curriculum development practices imposed by accepted practices and quality assurance processes. In chapter 1 I explicitly located this research in the power structures of a large college with significant audit demands and expectations, where compliance is expected and rewarded, for example in the production of schemes of work, class profiles, and the negotiation of goals and targets with students. Similar high levels of accountability are also imposed by funding providers, exam boards, inspectors and so on. Therefore, this research presents a direct challenge to an

entrenched status quo, and to the stances and beliefs of those in power. I intend not only to highlight the shortcomings of these approaches but also to offer a workable alternative to be further explored. The intention here is to bring about transformation of pedagogy *through* that pedagogy. The classroom is locus for change and freedom, no matter how mean or how grand, and so the research is a tool for change and freedom. I will be altering and reassessing my own role as teacher in the classroom, consciously shifting power over the *what* and to an extent the *how* of the learning process. The researcher is *embedded* in that which is being researched, and their values and opinions are to be challenged as much as the processes and systems which the research set out to explore.

The transformation is not purely for the teacher; a teacher does not work alone in an empty room, but is in a constant state of interaction with students. Thus, in empowering the teacher, we are also empowering students. It is crucial to remember as well that critical theory does not have to be radical, in the sense of leading to direct action, but also can simply be about raising the awareness of the participants *through* action and giving those participants the tools with which to enact power. Whether they choose to do so or not remains their choice, and I would argue that it is not the role of either the critical researcher or the critical teacher to insist on this.

Assuming, then, that both the learning process and language itself are social and interactive, it follows that a logical stance to take in terms of the ontology and epistemology is fundamentally interpretivist. With the emphasis on *participatory* interaction, which has its roots in Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) and focuses on emancipation and transformation in the students, it would also make sense that the research methodology also reflects this. Moreover, this research will be participatory not only in the sense that the students involved will contribute to the development of the research process itself but will also affect the teaching practices of the teacher-researcher.

Exploring Models for Practitioner Research

Because this was a piece of practitioner research, I needed to consider a methodology which acknowledged the role embeddedness of the practitioner, i.e. myself. An initial "natural fit" for such an approach might appear to be Action Research. After all, there was an element of change to practice, and professional learning as much as it was a piece of disconnected academic research. Action Research is summarised by Carr & Kemmis (1986) as:

> a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own

> practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out
>
> (Carr and Kemmis 1986. p. 162).

At its most basic, Action Research is a slightly more systematised variation of Schon's reflective cycle (Cohen et al. 2007). In AR the practitioner identifies a problem, researches and takes action on that problem, then reflects on and evaluates the impact of the problem, and from there makes direct change to practice.

Action research as a term was coined by Kurt Lewin in the 1950s (Carr, 2006, McNiff, 2013), who also devised the essential design for the action research cycle, where each cycle itself becomes the next stage of the cycle; a process which can be summarised briefly as follows:

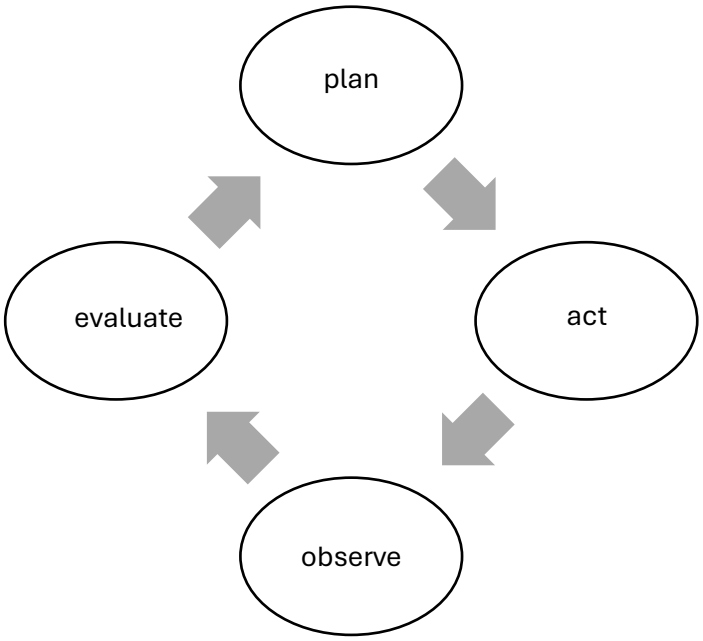


Figure 2 The Action Research Cycle

For an experienced teacher, these stages are no doubt instantly familiar from teacher training qualifications and processes, as part of the experiential learning cycle. Where AR differs or expands on this is through the emphasis on *action* and therefore on changes to practice.

McNiff (2013) outlines the process succinctly (McNiff, 2013, p.90) as following roughly these stages. First current practice is reviewed and evaluated, and an element of that practice is identified as needing change. Questions are then asked about what and how these problems should be investigated, and actions decided with which to carry out the investigation. We then

take these actions and observe and evaluate their impact, before then modifying the action and potentially embedding it in our practice. These modified actions are then also evaluated, leading to a reconsideration of what we are doing. One cycle may then lead to a subsequent cycle, to become "a continuing, or iterative, spiral of cycles which recur until the action researcher has achieved a satisfactory outcome and feels it is time to stop." (Burns, 2010, p. 7)

Certainly Action Research initially fitted the bill for this practitioner research, with the sense of criticality and empowerment. However, there are some issues which made this a challenging model for the research. For one, the fundamental principle of AR is that the starting point should be a problem identified by the researcher. Action research sets out to explore and resolve this problem, grounded in the practice of that researcher. In the case of this research, the problem was not simply of a single change to practice, or a specific problem linked to one element of classroom practice, but rather a complex, interleaved collection of problems - an entire syllabus and alternative, flexible curriculum process embedded in a highly performance managed environment across a full academic year. It was not a problem-solving process, and even McNiff's (2013) conceptualisation of "a spontaneous and self-recreating system of enquiry" (p.67) doesn't do enough to cover the large range of practices and events explored in the research. While the notion of praxis - "action with and for the development of understanding and commitment" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p.92) and models of reflective practice (Farrell, 2022) informed the process, it was not sufficient to describe the range of events that occurred.

A further shortcoming of Action Research which both Taber (2011) and Cohen et al (2007) observe is the extent to which the research as written represents the process. Does it show the full sequence of multiple cycles or does the research only cover a single such cycle? Where the latter is the case the research may have more in common with an experiment.

Therefore, while reflection and action were crucial to this as practitioner research, an alternative methodology was needed in order to ground the research in its context so it could be clearly analysed in terms of that context.

Case Study

At its most basic, a case study is a piece of research which "look[s] at a particular instance of some educational phenomena" (Taber, 2011. P.155), "which is examined, observed, described and analysed in order to capture key components of the 'case'" (Hamilton, 2011, p. 2).

Within this broader definition, variations can occur. Different writers draw on different labels (both Taber and Hamilton, writing in the same year, for example, describe very different types of case study as *instrumental*) so labels will be avoided, as they are often unhelpful. However, with a richer description, a case study can be seen as part of a larger whole, illustrating some aspect of a more general practice, or as an exploratory case study to develop an understanding of the contexts (Yin, 2018).

Crucially, however, a case study can focus on a single, specific and, most importantly, detailed context "it is of particular importance [to a teacher-researcher] because it is my school, my class, my students" (Taber, p,155). This contextual element, and the siting of the research in a particular context is a crucial element in justifying this research in terms of a case study. Yin (2018) writes of the *scope* of a case study as one of the key elements of a case study. The case study "investigates a contemporary phenomenon…within its real-world context" (Yin, 2018., p.45) and in a situation "where the phenomenon cannot be easily demarcated from its context" (ibid). In this research, for example, the context (the ESOL class, the organisation, the national context, even international contexts) has a direct influence on that being investigated - a set of practices. Yin (ibid.) compares a case study to an experiment and on the face of it, this research may appear to be experimental. However, the embeddedness of researcher and research means that the necessary observational distance required by an experiment (ibid. p.46) is not feasible, and to describe the case as such would fail to acknowledge this, and thus undermine any claims to truth that I may wish to make.

Rich and Strong

A recurring theme in case study analysis is the "richness" of the data, a term which arises in almost all the work on case studies; Cohen et al (2007), for instance describe a case study as being "concerned with a rich and vivid description of events" (p.253). Bassey (1999), like most writers, assigns a great deal of importance to this richness, with the richness allowing for "subsequent reinterpretation" (Bassey, 1999, p.23). This subsequent reinterpretation requires that the data and the researcher's process be open and explicit to those who access the research.

This richness and strength come from the eclecticism of the methodological approach: case studies "allow for a certain degree of methodological eclecticism" (Day Ashley, 2021, p 135) in the sense that the range of data and data types can be varied. Like the *bricoleur* ESOL teachers in Baynham et al. (2007) a case study allows for a *bricolage* approach to methods and data,

using the best tool to hand in order to develop an understanding of the phenomenon. Indeed, the range of this data is vital for the triangulation of two or more elements of data in order to move towards an in-depth understanding of the case (Day Ashley, 2021). For this research, for example, I explored not only the almost statistical coding of the emergent syllabus, but brought this into context through comparison with the denser narratives of my reflective journal, and the contributions of the individual students to focus group discussions.

The role of the researcher is also a key element of the case study, which acknowledges the reflexive position of the researcher within the research. Day Ashley (2021) argues that the "strength of a case study lies in its ability to enable the researcher to investigate intensively the case in depth, to probe, drill down and get at its complexity, often through immersion." (Day Ashley, 2021, p.135). This is assuredly true of my research as a *practitioner*-researcher. This was not just a piece of research rooted in the realities of *any* working teacher in a large FE college, and their development, but in *my* reality and *my* development *through* the research. While subjectivity is impossible to avoid in such a context, there is a strong claim to *authenticity* instead, giving an insight into curriculum practices, so that in the very least another teacher may look at the research and recognise some part of their own reality in it. Both Bassey (1999) and Cohen et al. (2007) quote from Adelman (1980) saying that the data in a case study is "strong in reality" but difficult to organise, while data from other research is "weak in reality" but easy to organise. This strength stems from the close link to the reality of the research - Cohen at al. (2007) describe it as "down-to-earth."

This ground level analysis of a specific instance, however, does not fully preclude wider generalisations, even if this not always the intention of case studies (Day Ashley, 2021). What the research data gives us is not a *scientific* generalisation (Bassey, 1999) where a hypothesis is identified and tested, with specific measurable outcomes, and neither is it a *statistical* generalisation (ibid.), where conclusions are drawn based on large statistical measures. Rather the data which comes from a case study leads to "fuzzy" (ibid.) generalisation, in Bassey's terms, "a statement with built in uncertainty" (ibid. p.52). Bassey is worth quoting in full on this theme of uncertainty as it has strong links to the importance of context in research into education.

> Suppose that instead the researcher said to teachers 'Do y instead of x and your pupils *may* learn more.' This is no minor change. It is not just introducing an element of uncertainty. It is not an admission of frailty in the way that the research was conducted. It is a firm reminder that

> there are many variables which determine whether learning takes place. And it is an invitation to teachers to enter into discourse about it: to read the evidence in support of this statement, to discuss it with anyone else who engages in x, to reflect on the issue, to test out in their own classroom the efficacy of y and to report the outcomes to whatever group will listen.
>
> (Bassey, 1999. pp. 51-52)

This is not dissimilar to the critique of the notion of 'best practice' by Frank Coffield and Sheila Edward (2008, op. cit.), and emphasises that all educational contexts are grounded in a specific contextual reality, and only by comparing that reality to the researched reality of others can more generalisable but *uncertain* claims be made, and from here the public understanding of the research and the contribution to wider knowledge can be drawn.

In the case of this research, for example, the case study can be considered alongside other studies in specific contexts such as those accounts by, for example Gallen (2014), Cooke, et al, (2023), Morgan (1999) and Auerbach (1992) which also locate the theoretical constructs of critical pedagogy and emergent language in a specific but comparable context. The context has been already clearly noted, and will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters, but in all of these cases, the students involved have been not only learners of English, but learners of English in a migrant learning context. There are some differences in context, of course - Morgan & Auerbach were working in Canada and the USA respectively, but both as part of independent charitable organisations. Cooke et al (2023) describe experiences from a primarily (although not exclusively) third sector charitable context, and Gallen's focus was on a shorter period of several lessons, rather than a whole year. However, broad conclusions as to the effectiveness and impact of the approaches to be outlined can be drawn by comparing such focussed studies, giving the research not only a specific relevance but a general value. Indeed, as I have noted elsewhere in the discussion around the epistemological framing of this research, my intention is only to contribute to a wider picture of how a language curriculum can be developed more democratically and with the intentions and backgrounds of the students placed to the forefront, rejecting the accountability agenda in pedagogy but at the same time ensuring that those accountability measures are satisfied.

A case study is as much method as it is methodology – the structure quite clearly indicates a specific approach to the research, but at the same time allows for a degree of flexibility. Case

studies as we have seen, allow for a range of qualitative and quantitative methods to be included, although in the current research the emphasis was on qualitative methods. Case study as a methodology allows for immersive analysis - again, which lends itself to a piece of practitioner-research, and both allow form some degree of freedom as regards specific data collection methods (which will be outlined below) without needing to be constrained to one or another "stance."

Ethical Considerations - How "vulnerable" are ESOL students?

There remains, however, one final arrow for our methodological quiver - a concern for the ethics of the research. After all, this was not a piece of research carried out in a petri dish, nor words on a page. At the centre of the research are the humans who contributed to the study, and the effect that the pedagogy had on them: after all, without students, no course could occur, and in particular on a course modelled on student contribution and experience, we need to consider the ethical stance within which we might view these experiences.

> "The action of the research process brings at least two people together to share thoughts, feelings, characteristics and histories; and this action opens the door for vulnerabilities to be seen, observed, recorded and reported."
>
> (Kincaid, 2018, pp.23-24)
>
> "Ethics are the justification of a researcher's actions as well as how those actions affect participants, participants families, the researcher, the research community, and the public research consumers."
>
> (Lahman, et al. 2010. p.1398)

Ethical considerations involve two elements – a formal process as required by the University itself which informs and is informed by the second element, the philosophical underpinnings around ethical research. Taking the BERA (2018, 2024) guidelines into consideration, I formally submitted an ethics review for the University. As all the research participants were neither under the age of 18 nor vulnerable adults, this meant that the main considerations tended towards issues of consent and confidentiality, and the participants' active role in understanding these issues and being able to engage with them. It is the discussion around how ESOL students and their ability to make sense of the often opaque legalistic language of confidentiality and consent to which we will now turn.

It would be tempting to think of socially functioning adult students with an effective command of the English language as not especially vulnerable. The students involved in this study are adult ESOL students at Level 1 or Level 2. Many have passed at least one exam at this level, usually speaking and listening, meaning that to an extent they can be described as being at least *independent users* of English, or even *proficient*. (SQA, 2021). While some barriers to understanding and contribution do remain for these students, they can describe and explain most things clearly and explicitly, and if not, they are able to paraphrase in more familiar terms. Therefore, the question of language as a barrier to understanding and responding to most interview questions is unlikely to be an issue. Many of the students are also highly educated, with many having some form of higher education in their home countries, and even where this is not the case, are capable of organising themselves, homes, families, jobs and more, and still attend college at least twice a week.

> Certainly this group of students (and indeed many ESOL students past beginner level) do not conform to the legal definition of a vulnerable adult (The Police Act Regulations 2002) which defines a vulnerable adult as someone who is in receipt of particular social and health care support, such as needing support with independent living, having a learning or physical disability. The disabilities are specified as follows:
>
> (a)dependency upon others in the performance of, or a requirement for assistance in the performance of, basic physical functions;
>
> (b)severe impairment in the ability to communicate with others; or
>
> (c)impairment in a person's ability to protect himself from assault, abuse or neglect.
>
> (Police Act Regulations 2002)

The severe impairment in the ability to communicate would be unlikely to include second language needs and refer instead to the ability to use *any* language. My own experience as an observer of ESOL students is that they would rarely describe their language needs as a disability.

Lahman (2018) however, warns against being limited by legal definitions of vulnerability and suggests that as researchers we should "consider all people who give their time to be in research as potentially vulnerable." (Lahman, 2018. p.18). She presents a taxonomy of

vulnerability to consider when consider participants in a research study which suggests a number of potential vulnerabilities which may apply to ESOL learners in research project. Primarily this would be what she describes as “judicious” in that the participants are “liable to the authority of others who may have an independent interest in that participation” (Lahman, 2018. p.19). In terms of this study as well we can consider Kincaid’s (2018) reflection quoted above, and that we can never be fully aware of an individual’s vulnerabilities, particularly when the disparate language abilities of the researcher and those they are researching are different. As the researcher-teacher of the students included in the study there remains an inescapable power imbalance in our conversations, where “dual roles may also introduce explicit tensions” (BERA, 2024, p. 16). As researcher and writer of the research I have the advantage over the students who not only are students but dependent upon my reasonable and honest reporting of their lived experiences in the ESOL classroom, which may or may not involve moments of personal awareness and sharing. And we cannot escape the inevitable inequalities of my position as a white, middle class male in a position of power in the classroom: it is essential, therefore, for me to identify how my own beliefs about learning and the positioning of the students have an impact on the interactions in lessons and on the development of the curriculum.

A further concern with research into practice is the nature of confidentiality – the data gathered may at times link to the students’ personal lives, some of which may be politically or socially complex. In order to offset this, all names of students have been removed from any published data. Biographical data looms large in the participatory classroom, however, where students’ lives and stories are a significant part of the resources used in the teaching process. The physical location of the lessons and course explored is also necessary in order to place the research into its context. As I have discussed above, the contextualisation and the transparency of the research is an essential part of how a case study like this can be verified – where “researchers should endeavour to make their data and methods amenable to reasonable external scrutiny” (BERA, 2024, p.29).

More importantly for me, however, is that this research can be accessible not only to the academic community which often operates at a remove from practical teaching, but also can be explored by teachers themselves to identify the extent to which the practices explored herein could be applied to their own practice. This, however, is more likely to be through articles and workshops outside of the thesis and the research, and in these contexts all biographical information will be removed, or anonymised completely through how it is

described. In the event where this is impossible, participants will be approached directly. It is also important that a version of this research be made accessible to the students involved in the research, and as such a much shortened and simplified version of the findings and the approaches has been sent to the student participants.

Culturally Responsive Relational Reflexive Ethics (CRRE)

This is an ethical stance for researchers developed by Lahman et al. and summarised in an article in 2010. In this stance, the researcher needs to be:

Culturally responsive – that is acknowledging that we are "immersed in culture at all times and cannot separate ourselves from it" (Lahman et al. 2010. p.1401). Briefly, culture is defined here as something subjective and individually diverse, but including "traditions, rituals, ways of life and customs" (ibid). Research occurs in and is a part of this culture. In order to be culturally *responsive* however, involves not only acknowledging our place within and contributing to the culture, but also that a culturally responsive researcher makes an effort to acknowledge the social and cultural contexts of those we are researching, and to maintain a consistent dialogue with those research participants as valid individuals who may want to withdraw or change their participation in the study.

Relational Ethics – Here *relational* is used to mean the recognition of and respect for the relationship between those researched and those researching. Trust is crucial (Lahman, et al. 2010, Lahman, 2018) and there should be an intention to "seek the good" (Lahman, 2018. p.33). This notion of good depends upon the context of the research, and as highly contextualised research, with the researcher as practitioner fulfilling both the roles of researched and researching, *and* having a responsibility to the students as part of the research, my own role in the discussions in data collection must always be evaluated and acknowledged.

Reflexive Ethics – This is a piece of *reflexive* research. Lahman (2018) quotes from Hertz, 1997 as saying that reflexivity is an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment." (Hertz, 1997, p.viii, in Lahman, 2018, p.34.) Unlike *reflection* which occurs *after* the event, reflexivity occurs at all stages of a process. To be reflexive a researcher should be "sensitive to the interactions o self, others and situations" and "notice the reactions to a research situation and [adapt] in a responsive, ethical and moral way."(Lahman, et al. 2010, p.1403). Again, this ethical stance is a crucial element of the curriculum being researched – itself a reflexive, responsive approach to curriculum design which bends according to the winds of change across the duration course itself.

Ethics and Migration

A further consideration is that some elements of the research may focus on questions of migration and the migration experiences of the students. Considered purely in terms of their migration journeys, the students are incredibly diverse – including former asylum seekers, migrant workers, recipients of the EU resettlement scheme and spouses. Their experiences as migrants are an aspect of their individual experiences of life which while it may not define the students, it does inform and explain their current lives – as Lahman et al (2018, in Lahman, 2018) explain it – "One way to better understand people who immigrate is to reflect on why they did it." (p.121). The specific questions of migration are not being researched, but there are some ethical concerns relating to the status and experiences of the students, including:

- acknowledging my own attitudes to migration
- acknowledging the experiences of the students and the potential trauma they may have experienced.
- the cultural contexts in which the students live, have lived, and will live in the future.

Again, *reflexivity* is key here, repositioning the researcher as a "co-learner" rather than an expert (Lahman, et al., 2018, in Lahman, 2018), not dissimilar to the "co-researcher" of Fine & Torres (2021). This is not only a key element of the research method but also a key component of the research itself – repositioning the teacher as a well-informed co-creator of learning with the students. Although the focus of the research is not specifically migration and its effects, the lives of the students involved in the study have inevitably been profoundly affected by both the act of migration and their societal position as migrants. It is not the role of this study, or of this researcher to comment on migration, but my own views as researcher may lead to a biased slant to the interpretation of data, and to the approach to teaching used. As a teacher of migrants, it is perhaps implicitly clear that I am sympathetic to their situations. However, it perhaps does need briefly stating explicitly that as a researcher I am not only sympathetic to the situation of migrants but also activist in my own practices as a teacher. This involves naturally the direct intervention of language teaching in the students' lives, but also in action to improve the students' contexts and situations beyond the classroom.

There is also the nature of some classroom activities, part of the subject of the research, which will draw on the students' present and past lives, and which therefore may provoke, or even record specific emotional reactions to the content. This data will need to be handled with

consideration and care for the students and will need to be included in consideration of consent.

Understanding Consent

The practice of asking for consent from research participants is an expectation when carrying out research (BERA, 2024). However, the granting and understanding of *what* students are consenting to is often couched in terms not dissimilar to complex legal documents. This is inevitable, perhaps in the need for such consent to be clarified open, but as is often the case in such contexts the language needed for this is complex and often achieves the opposite.

In order to ensure clarity over consent I took several steps, built into the ESOL course itself. At the beginning of the course, during the induction period of the course, I outlined briefly to *all* my students the broad nature and focus of my research and that I may be approaching them for consent for the course.

With the group in the research cohort, I delivered a session on the course which went into more detail as to the nature of the research study, and employed an appropriately graded consent form for the students to complete. Consent forms are often linguistically complicated, so I based the text of the form on those outlined by Starling, and an example can be seen in the appendices to the thesis. The students who are the focus of the course being taught have all achieved at least Entry Level 3 in ESOL, and therefore capable of understanding relatively complex texts, clarity remains an issue. Primarily, however, I drew on my own experiences as a tutor of grading texts for students and ensuring clarity of college documents such as handbooks and induction guidance.

Reflexivity and Practitioner Research

Like many, if not all, social science researchers, and certainly educational novice researchers, the ‘scientific’ positivism of absolute knowledge is the de facto standard against which all other research can be measured. My own memories of school, a disastrous sociology A-level notwithstanding, confined research to the physical sciences, with an emphasis on the observable, the objective and the dispassionate, like HG Wells’s Martians in the quote at the start of this chapter. These are hard preconceptions to break, founded as they are in my early educational experiences, and these have lingered on through the course of this research leading me to question and challenge my own later-acquired convictions throughout. This is perhaps a symptom of what Carr and Kemmis (2005) refer to as “scientism…a culture that

insists that any form of reasoning that does not conform to the technical rationality of science should be excluded from the realm of rational discourse" (Carr & Kemmis, 2005, p. 351). Much like my students' continual lack of "progress" with the present simple third person singular, the error of assuming that knowledge is always objective, and that research should always sit outside that being researched has become a fossilised error of judgement.

In the quote at the start of the chapter, HG Wells hits the nail on the head when he describes this dispassionate observation as narrow: in a sense, the Martian positivist ontology failed to acknowledge the interactions of the human race with its ecology leading ultimately to their downfall by the end of the novel at the hands of bacterial and viral infection. I am not an alien invader into the research space; rather I am part of that space, as much that being researched as I am researching it.

This placement within the research space centralises my own beliefs and values, and these are inescapable. I have mentioned "reflexivity", for example, several times but not defined this central component to the research. Olmos-Vega et al (2023) review definitions of reflexivity and identify their own definition as follows:

> Reflexivity is a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes.
>
> (ibid. p.242)

Reflexivity has multiple purposes. It could be seen as helping to neutralise the inevitable subjectivity of qualitative research by acknowledging or even capitalising on it, although this is problematic, as it suggests a hierarchy of researched and researcher, leaning into the ideal mentioned above of the dispassionate, distanced researcher. However, this acknowledgement of subjectivity can be seen as a strength in other ways. By identifying the beliefs and values of the researcher, and their social and cultural background, it becomes possible for other researchers and (for me at least) other teachers to identify the extent to which the findings can be transferred to their own and to other contexts.

Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) present reflexive "orientations" as laid out below:

- **personal reflexivity** - the researcher's socio-economic, cultural and professional background, as well as their beliefs and opinions over what is being researched.

- **interpersonal reflexivity** - the relationships within and around the research, the researcher and the participants
- **Methodological reflexivity** - a critical understanding of how the methodological decisions made during the research affect the research itself, including the boundaries that those decisions might place on the research.,
- **contextual reflexivity** - the context in which the research occurs.

Reflexive considerations should be considered throughout the research, and not limited to a simple statement within the 'methodology' section (Shepherd, et. al. 2022), which can be seen in the accounts and descriptions by, for example, Attia & Edge (2017) and Albuloushi, et al, (2021).

While Olmos-Vega et al (2023) present four orientations, Attia & Edge (2017) describe a slightly different approach to reflexivity, focussed on its role in development as a researcher. This strikes a chord as a relatively inexperienced researcher who has been on a research journey during the researching and writing of this thesis, and with the dominant model of research applied herein. Here the distinction is made between "prospective reflexivity" - the impact of the researcher on the research, so very much the model which we have been discussing thus far. However, they also consider "retrospective reflexivity" which considers the impact of the research on the self, the journey made by the researcher in carrying out the research, and the impact it has had on them. They describe research as a trajectory, the interpretation of which "indexes the individual development experienced." (Attia & Edge, 2017. p.35).

Although statements of reflexivity are perhaps trite, and run the risk of being tokenistic nods to complex realities, it is necessary to lay out the nature and the role of the researcher, in particular my role as a practitioner-researcher, that is research done by a practitioner, in this case a teacher, working in their own context.

Such research may not stand up to scrutiny when examined under the lens of "scientism" - that only objective exploration can explain or provide knowledge, in any area of study. However this is demonstrably false. Carr & Kemmis (2005) observe, it is impossible for any investigation into educational experiences to be entirely subjective, implying that any researcher into education will inevitably bring their own biases and prejudices, and arguing that "value-free. 'objective' social science" (ibid. p. 192) is illusory.

To assume as well that "objective" science is the only lens through which we can examine education renders it impossible to allow for even simple day to day reflections and

observations in teaching practice, never mind more structured practitioner research. This would be, of course absurd - after all, learning by and through experience is an essential element of any human activity, and to dismiss this would be to dismiss learning in all its forms, except, of course, the positivist scientific study.

This does present concerns, as we have seen. The research was deeply contextualised and intentionally so. I wanted to examine my own practice in my own context, and therefore learn from this so that others may also do so. There may be other Level 2 ESOL classes, much like the one at the centre of this research, but any parallels may be superficial and limited by the specific contexts of the learning, the superdiversity of the learners and, of course, the teacher themselves. The intention of the research was change on a specific level, to explore and develop an approach to teaching which can be shared; disseminated and discussed, and produce findings which can be explored and examined by others so that they too can identify their own way through.

In many respects, the research is a dialogue like that described by Hall & Wall (2020) between "two separate 'selves' that are courteously engaged in discovery both about the 'project' and about one another" (ibid). In this case, we can define both the teacher-self and the researcher-self, a single entity perhaps, but nevertheless looking at the research in two different roles.

Personal Reflexivity: the beliefs and values of the researcher

At the centre of my practice as a teacher is an essential disbelief in notions of best practice, for reasons most clearly outlined in Coffield & Edward (2008, op.cit). Although I was a researcher in the context of this research I was also a teacher, and as a teacher, there is a constant drive towards "best practice" - clearly defined universally effective teaching practices. This is, of course, nonsense. Not all things work with all students in all contexts: and as a teacher of ESOL, this is often very clear: much is made in modern educational discourse of Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction (Rosenshine, 2012), for example, or practical applications of cognitive load theory (e.g. Sweller, 2017) yet these largely assume a clarity of communication and shared language between teacher and student, not to mention an assumption that the teacher is delivering explicit knowledge rather than developing a complex, unintuitive interweaving of skill and knowledge (cf. Long, 2015, Ellis, 2015).

As a teacher, then, I do not believe in absolutes, and this carries through to my research stance. If a piece of research is carried out with a group of teenaged history students in California, I will question, immediately, its applicability to my own context of adult ESOL, and why would you

not? These contexts are clearly different, socially, culturally and pedagogically, even if we can claim that the architecture of the human brain in both cases is identical. Similarly, a study carried out in a university with first year degree students as the subject can only be entirely applicable to that context.

My starting point, then, was never that I wanted to make claims for statistical generalisability, but perhaps to "spark a resonant wide-awakeness" (Fine & Torres, 2021. p.82) with other teachers struggling with the same questions around accepted curriculum practices in ESOL.

Experience and knowledge of my context has proven invaluable in the research – throughout the research I have positioned myself explicitly as both researcher and that being researched. While this may be a potential weakness in the opinions of some, it is, I believe, a strength. By making use of the context and acknowledging the subjectivity, others can define their own readings of the research through their own lenses. The research draws from a contextually rich backdrop, and this context is a key element of the methodology. It is therefore necessary in the findings and the discussions and recommendations that follow to foreground the context to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. This foregrounding and transparency around the context of the research serves not to restrict the validity of any claims made, but rather enhance it.

After all, objectivity, divorced from politics and opinion, is, as I have already argued, virtually impossible in education at the best of times. Education is a politically loaded space, and all researchers into education, be they embedded practitioner-researchers or externally located academics, have an opinion about what should happen. This will influence their reading of the results, however obtained, so it makes sense that this be made a strength. It is the nature and content of that research to which I shall now turn, defining the data gathered and how it was analysed, before then discussing the findings and presenting the conclusions from that data.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis Approach

Introduction

While the previous chapter laid out the overarching philosophical grounding and the methodological approach to the research, there remains the question of how the data was gathered and then subsequently analysed. We will first review the research questions, and the setting of the case study, with a brief review of the contextual factors influencing the course. I will outline the approach used to analyse the data, illustrated with examples of the data gathered, before reviewing the findings through the lenses of the data analysis in chapter 5.

The Case in Hand

The research focused on a group of students being taught based on the principles outlined above in chapter 2. This was a continually adapting and updating course, which developed as the year went on. Adaptations to the pedagogical approach were based on ongoing reflections and discussions with students, identifying gaps and barriers, and moving on from there. Iterative teacher professional development was happening not just across the course, but within the course and the lessons themselves. The course was responsive and reflexive and therefore depended on these ongoing observations and evaluations. It spanned one academic year and took place between September 2021 and May 2022.

The students were an international group, from countries as diverse as Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Russia, Morocco and Nigeria, speaking an even wider range of languages (including German, Italian, Spanish and Basque, despite none of the students being born in countries which use those languages). The range of languages is important when considering ESOL learners, as students' other languages can have a significant impact on their English learning. All of the group were working towards Level 2 in the ESOL curriculum (roughly B2 – C1 on the CEFR), although in reality the range of actual ability was far more extensive. They were all ordinarily resident in the UK, having spent at least 3 years in the UK or in the EU. This is a limited viewpoint, of course: the students in this group were superdiverse. They were not merely diverse within the simple bounds of the Equality Act (2010), of age, race, gender, disability, religion, sexuality, maternity, marital status and transgender, but by their wider experiences of education, family and socio-economic status, not to mention their values and beliefs outside of the religious. A more complete profile of the group is in Appendix 2.

During this phase I also applied the methods to other groups that I was teaching at the time, and to reflect on the differences between groups, where one task might lead to a range of affordances arising, thus sending the groups in different directions during the year. However, in order to focus and ensure clarity, I chose not to formally compare the curriculum experienced by the subject group with the language and outcomes achieved by the other groups.

I gathered the following data:

- Regular photographs and examples of classroom artefacts – largely whiteboard images, as these summarised the content of each lesson in some detail, but also student written work, and annotated lesson materials, often via interactive whiteboard software.
- A retrospectively written, sometimes incomplete, scheme of work listing some of the language items which emerged during lessons.
- A record of reflections I wrote as teacher and teacher-researcher, some written as handwritten notes during sessions and others written between sessions, using several formats, including a series of published and unpublished blog posts.
- Student focus groups. These were held at the end of the research period. These centred on open ended questions linking to the themes of the research and used largely to identify the opinions of the students on what had happened. I selected semi-structured questions as the students responded well to more open discussion in the lessons.

The purpose of the data was to help provide answers to the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?
- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

Data Analysis Approach

For a practitioner-researcher embedded in their own research, making sense of the data is a daunting task. The data is not always cold lists of numbers, and neither does it fall into predictable or even comfortable categories to be pinned down and tidily dissected. Instead, the data lives in, around and even *within* the researcher; a constantly shifting feast. And yet

some sense needs to be extracted from this in order to use the data to evaluate and review the process.

The data gathered from this research took several forms due to the nature of the questions being asked, but it is all qualitative "thick" data – "precious data from humans, like stories, and interactions that cannot be quantified." (Wang, 2016, 11:44). Wang expands on the value of such data, arguing that "what makes it so thick and meaty is the experience of understanding the human narrative." (ibid. 12:05). A rich and thorough description of the events allowed for a greater sense of transferability (Amankwaa, 2016) because the density of the data makes clear the events in the research and allows for the reader or consumer of the research to make their own judgement as to the applicability of the research to their own or to others' practices. Amankwaa (ibid. p26) summarises it thus: "The investigator in essence is telling a story with enough detail that the consumer/reader obtains a vivid picture of the events of the research."

The complexity of the data, however, is where the problem arose when it came to being able to make claims on even a personal level. It became necessary, therefore, to apply some level of rigour and be systematic in the analysis (Nowell, et al. 2017) so that any claims or suggestions made are both credible and trustworthy (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This required me, as researcher "to demonstrate clearly how interpretations of the data have been achieved and to illustrate findings with quotations from, or access to, the raw data" (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006 p.82).

In this research I applied a hybrid blend of qualitative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2019: Vaismoradi, et al, 2013) for the syllabus content and a thematic analysis (Xu & Zammit, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006) for the reflective journals and the focus group discussions.

While both approaches are similar in intent, and sit in line with the overarching critical stance of the research (Neuendorf, 2019), the nature of the data gathered for tracking the progress of the syllabus is quite different from the data gathered for the reflections and focus groups: the former being focused on frequency and sequence, with content being easily and objectively defined in advance. Content analysis emphasises frequency as an indicator of the relevance of a code, i.e. the more frequent the occurrence, the greater the importance, which allowed me to simply monitor and measure these codes. This was only a very simple variation of the process, but allowed me to develop a background framework against which I could compare and discuss the reflective journals and focus groups.

The more narrative, textual data gathered from the reflective journals and focus groups required a more reflective approach which acknowledged the subjectivity of both research and researcher - as Braun & Clarke (2022a) explain: “we view analysis as a subjective process shaped by what we bring to it” (2022a, p.55). I have previously discussed the inevitable subjectivity of practitioner research and argued that it is *impossible* to describe educational research in purely objective terms. This relative subjectivity lends itself more naturally to thematic analysis with its emphasis on meaning-making and interpretation (ibid.).

I discuss thematic analysis in more detail below (“Analysing the Reflections”) but in both approaches the notion of a “code” is crucial and needs to be defined. Saldaňa (2016) supplies a clear definition: “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (Saldaňa, 2016. p.3), although Braun & Clarke’s (2022a) definition of “an analytically interesting idea, concept or meaning associated with particular segments of data” (ibid. p.55) is perhaps more succinct. The codes I used blended both deductive (decided in advance) and inductive (arising and emerging from the data during the process) and incorporated both latent (i.e. implicit), and semantic (i.e. surface) interpretations. As Braun & Clarke (2022a) and Xu & Zammit (2016) both argue, such things are not dichotomies, but rather expressions of a scale or continuum of difference.

We will now explore the two sets of analyses and discuss issues around coding, before proceeding in Chapter 5 to a more in depth analysis of the findings.

Analysing the Syllabus

The syllabus content was gathered in two primary ways - through written records of a retrospective “scheme of work” and photographs of classroom whiteboards taken across the year. These were analysed in terms of their syllabus content using traditional descriptions of language. This enabled me to easily analyse the overall course content, and give an overview of the means applied to achieve this.

The course content started with initial codes, deductively developed from the underlying theory around curriculum design and syllabus models (Nunan, 1988; Nation & Macalister, 2010) and in particular linked to the first research question “How does the curriculum evolve?” In particular, I was interested to know what *kind* of curriculum arose and how it was expressed in traditional units such as grammar, vocabulary and so on.

This took two stages. The first of these was to review the weekly records and artefacts generated to identify and clarify what happened. This record was then analysed deductively in the first instance, using the broader linguistic coding of skills and language.

The codes used were as follows:

Language Focus	**Skills Developed /Practised**	**Methods used**
G = grammar V = vocabulary P = Pronunciation F = Functions	S = Speaking & Listening L = Listening R = Reading W = Writing	T = Text led C = Conversation led M = Materials led O = Other TI = Teacher Initiated SI = Student Initiated OI = Initiated by other means (see notes)

Table 2 - syllabus analysis codes

Most of these are self-evident in meaning, but for clarity and precision the concepts here are defined as follows:

Grammar here refers to the structure of the language in the sense of how "words and phrases are combined to produce sentences." (Richards & Schmidt, 1997, p.230). I would expand this slightly to the concept of utterances which may or may not be technically complete sentences, but which follow a systematic and learnable structure.

Vocabulary, or lexis, refers here to individual words, compound words, and collocations. There are multiple elements here, but I have, for the sake of this research, also included grammar-like systems and structures, including morphology and collocation.

Pronunciation here includes the forming of individual sounds (phonemics) and to suprasegmental elements such as stress and intonation.

Functions refer to language employing a range of lexical and grammatical forms to perform social acts such as requests, apologies and complaints, but which "cannot be determined simply by studying the grammatical structure of the sentences." (Richards & Schmidt, 2002. p. 214)

The definitions of the methods, in particular defining of an activity as "student initiated" or "teacher initiated" was more complex, and perhaps as indicative of my own beliefs and perceptions, as much as it is about the nature of the lessons, hence my description of this as a *qualitative* content analysis. However, the other elements are more clearly objective, based, as they are on what happened, what was used, and what language elements became the focus of the lessons.

Lessons were 2.5 hours long, with one session taught on a Thursday two on a Friday. With lessons of that length, therefore, a single pedagogical focus is unlikely, although not impossible. A single lesson typically included some sort of skills development both receptive and productive as well as at least one language focus. Where necessary, the three lessons of each week were labelled using letters, where **a** refers to Thursday morning, **b** to Friday morning, and **c** to Friday afternoon. Where the lesson focus carried through between, say, Friday morning and afternoon, this distinction was not recorded.

These were then recorded onto a spreadsheet with the level of focus recorded numerically to demonstrate the priority and the sequence of each item as in the example displayed in fig. 2.

Figure 3 would indicate a week in which lessons developed from a teacher selected reading

	Lang				Skill				Methods							Observations & Examples
Week	G	V	P	F	S	L	R	W	T	C	M	O	TI	SI	OI	
12	1	1		1	1		1		1	1			1			

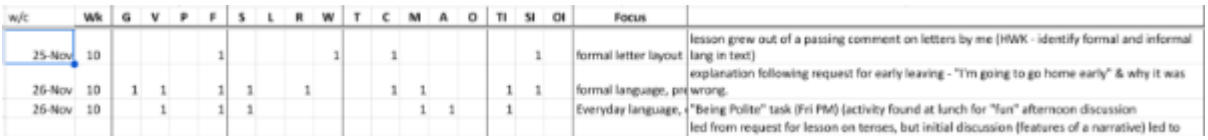
Figure 3 Illustration of syllabus analysis

text (TI) and focussed primarily on reading and speaking skills. Language emerged from this consisting primarily of vocabulary with a secondary focus on grammatical structures and on language functions.

While working through the analysis, I also annotated the topic/focus of the lesson (e.g. *personality, narratives, Work*) and some examples and commentary on the activities and the language emerging. These could then be used to clarify more carefully the details of the structure.

This data, once analysed and coded, was compared to the descriptions in the teacher journal, and in the student reflections to develop a sense of how lessons progressed both in themselves and across the course, with those observations added to the "observations and examples" columns.

Thus, a completed set of lessons looked like this:



w/c	Wk	G	V	P	F	S	L	R	W	T	C	M	A	O	TI	SI	OI	Focus	
25-Nov	10				1				1		1					1		formal letter layout	lesson grew out of a passing comment on letters by me (HWK - identify formal and informal lang in text)
26-Nov	10	1	1		1	1		1			1	1			1	1		formal language, pr	explanation following request for early leaving - "I'm going to go home early" & why it was wrong.
26-Nov	10		1		1	1						1	1		1			Everyday language,	"Being Polite" task (Fri PM) (activity found at lunch for "fun" afternoon discussion led from request for lesson on tenses, but initial discussion (features of a narrative) led to

Figure 4 Analysis of a completed set of lessons

However, this only presented me with an overview of the course, in response to the first two research questions (RQ1 & RQ2), but needed clarification and a more detailed description. This extra detail allowed me not only to be able to draw more complete conclusions from the data, but also to allow for extra confidence and credibility in the data itself.

Analysing Reflections & Focus Groups

The remainder of the data consisted of written reflections maintained through the year and student feedback through focus groups. This data required a different approach, as it consisted of longer narrative accounts and interview discussions, rather than lists of activities (the retrospective scheme of work) and language items (the classroom artefacts). For this data, I chose to use thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017; Nowell, et al. 2017, Xu & Zammit, 2020). This is "the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data" (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017. p.3352) and is best considered a "method rather than a methodology" in that it is free of attachment to specific epistemological or theoretical standpoints. There are conditions attached, of course, including the notion that the data not only be of a sufficient quantity from which to make any claims, but also be of appropriate quality, which is explored further below. However, thematic analysis can be carried out across a range of different data types, and this suited the data gathered, consisting as it did of narrative accounts, focus group interviews and captured classroom artefacts.

I followed the stages suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006) and subsequently clarified and exemplified by Maguire and Delahunt (2017) and Xu & Zammit (2020). Xu & Zammit (ibid) in particular, were particularly informative as not only did they illustrate thematic analysis in a

language learning context, but also used almost identical types of data to my own: teacher-researcher journals and student focus groups to explore practitioner research.

In line with the suggested stages in Braun & Clarke (2006. 2021, 2022a) and Xu & Zammit (2020) I followed six stages:

1. Familiarising myself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and Naming themes
6. Producing the Report

Step 1: Familiarising myself with the data.

My first task with the reflective journal was to become more familiar with the data. In the first instance, this simply involved reading and re-reading the reflective journals, and transcribing, then reading *and* listening to the recorded student focus groups.

From the perspective of a reflective practitioner and, indeed, a practitioner researcher interested in their own practice, simply reading and re-reading the texts as suggested by Xu & Zammit (2020) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017) and was an informative and sometimes evocative process: these were, after all, my own words. There are concerns, often, with analysing one's own language, with the subjectivity of the analysis. However, the analysis began towards the end of the research period and concluded a full year or so after the research period had finished. The final analysis was also written following a change of employer on the part of the researcher; a small detail, perhaps, but an important one, as I was able to consider the reflections at a physical and psychological distance, not to mention temporal. This distance gave the effect of studying something written by someone else. I feel less closely connected to the notes and the comments and have therefore been able to analyse with perhaps a greater degree of objectivity than might otherwise have been the case.

The reflective data consisted of handwritten diaries recorded periodically through the research period, as well as blog posts, some drafted, some published (Shepherd, n.d.), as well as reflective comments written in notebooks, and other informal locations as and when they arose. At the end of the research period, I gathered these together into a single set of printed documents to be read and coded by hand. I elected *not* to use digital means to do this as the

process of transcribing handwritten texts themselves, either through OCR or simply through the act of reading and typing up would not have added any extra insight into the process; indeed, the handwritten diaries also include features which would be impossible to capture in digital form such as crossings out, asides, extra emphasis and so on. This helps to give a larger sense of the importance and some sense of nuance to the data which can extend beyond the merely verbal. Handwritten text, more so than typed, can carry extra emphasis which would be lost in even a fairly faithful transcription. The image in figure 5 below, presented as an example, demonstrates how meta-linguistic aspects (arrows, underlining, capitals) would translate poorly in a typed equivalent. Diary notes are inevitably inconsistent, being made in the moment with minimal thought as to the *how* of the notation in order to capture the *what*.

From the perspective of a practitioner researcher exploring their own practice, simply reading and re-reading the texts as suggested by Xu & Zammit (2020) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017) was an informative and sometimes evocative process: these were, after all, my own words. The analysis began towards the end of the research period and concluded a full year or so after the research period had finished. The final analysis was also written following a change of employer on the part of the researcher; a small detail, perhaps, but an important one, as I was able to consider the reflections at a physical and psychological distance, not to mention temporal. This distance gave the effect of studying something written by someone else. I felt less closely connected to the notes and the comments and was therefore able to analyse with perhaps a greater degree of objectivity than might otherwise have been the case.

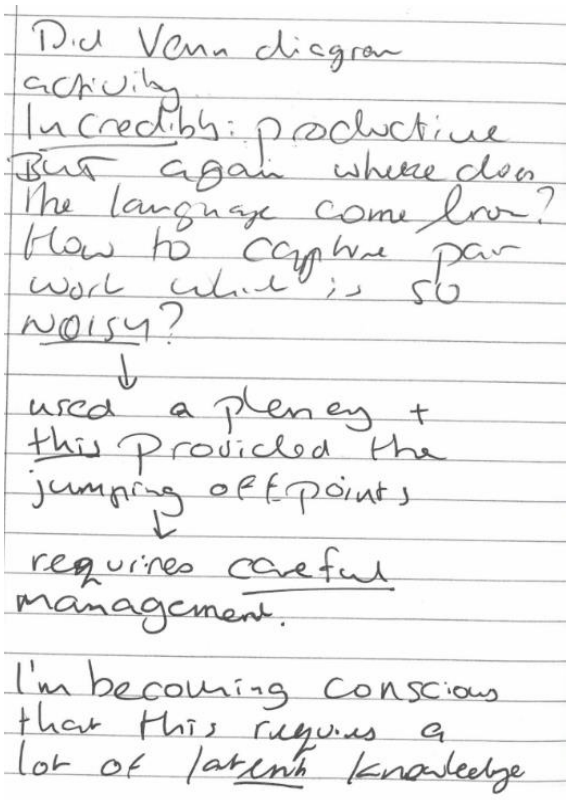


Figure 5 A sample of handwritten reflections

Issues with analysing learners' language

The student data was gathered in two focus group discussions - one with a pair of students and the other in a small representative group. These groupings were based primarily on practical restrictions but do represent a full range of the students in the group in terms of their superdiversity.

The interviews took place at the end of a classroom session and were audio recorded before being transcribed. While it should probably go without saying in a study involving ESOL learners, it should be borne in mind in what follows that English is not the first language of any of the respondents, which does present some issues of accuracy of meaning and intention of statements. Traditional interpretations of language meaning cannot be easily applied, either through developmental errors of usage, or through transfer from other languages used by the students. Seibert (2022) observes accurately that "transcribers capture the fleeting moments of social roles and values constituted in language and do so through their own language ideologies." (Seibert, 2022, p.503) and that "authors who describe their transcription method/construction and its effect on the analysis/findings build confidence and transparency with their studies." (ibid.)

Bearing this in mind then, it is important at this stage to remind the reader of the level of the students and in particular what this meant for their language ability. All the students had achieved a pass at Level 1 (i.e. B2 on the CEFR) and therefore can communicate with clarity for the most part. That said, the limitations of exams meant that the students may well have achieved the exam but still require significant development in some areas. Add to that the number of students who passed exams during the covid-19 lockdown of 2020, where tutors were told to pass students as if continuing on their then current (as at March 2020) trajectory. Inevitably, as online learning was at that point a new experience for both students and teachers, many students passed Entry 3 and Level 1 exams when perhaps their language was not yet fully at that level – the gap between what would have been achieved and what was achieved is therefore quite large.

My approach to offset this was to listen repeatedly to the recordings, acknowledging the full range of the students' interlanguage and their English language ability. This helped to further establish any nuances of meaning supplied through emphasis and timing, rather than simply through grammar and vocabulary. This is where, for the most part, my knowledge of the students, their language and their contexts may have been an advantage: as a teacher of ESOL it is easy to *tune in* to the language of the learners based partly on familiarity with the students' linguistic abilities, (for example issues of accent or grammatical errors) but also their own lived experiences. In group A, for example, student S3 described her lack of success, which contrasted with a previous statement of having achieved a lot, but the context of this was unclear. However, I knew as her teacher that she is referring to a failed reading exam in the previous academic year, and not the impact of the course at the current time. There is a benefit,

I believe, to being the teacher-as-researcher here, in that this kind of biographical data was known to me and could be applied when interpreting the results. This is made clear in chapter 5, which includes commentary from my observations and experiences of those students.

As a further note, the language used by the students not only includes obvious "errors" in use of tense, word order and other grammatical features, but also potentially confusing elements of grammar and vocabulary where first language transfer or simply losing track of pronoun referencing offers opportunity for a lack of clarity. In the section that follows, I quote from student statements and comments during the interviews. It would be patronising and inauthentic to "correct" statements (although paraphrasing and interpreting with caution may be required at times) and while it would be customary to mark inaccurate language in quoted comments with *sic* I have chosen not to do so to ensure clarity and to give an authentic sense to the students' voices. Any errors in language in the student statements, therefore, is to be assumed as naturally occurring on the part of the students, rather than arising through author error.

Step 2: Identifying Initial Codes

This was a somewhat organic process. After reading and familiarising myself with the data from both the personal reflections and the student focus groups, I devised in the first instance a series of *deductive, a priori* codes linked to the data and to the research questions, with some overlap to those used in the syllabus breakdown. These included:

How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?	**What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?**
• Method (how language emerges) • Source of language • student/teacher input	• Method (classroom activities) • Student agency
How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?	**What barriers occur to this process?**
• Student expectations • Teacher role • Student role	• Accountability issues • Organisational expectations

Table 3 - Initial codes for thematic analysis

The process was repeated, and as the analysis continued, further *inductive* themes arose, including issues such as student agency, teacher influence on content, teacher habit, student personal issues, power imbalance, translanguaging and multilingual practices, and classroom as a community. There was, of course, a "miscellaneous" code - things which sparked interest in some way but perhaps didn't quite fit any of the main points, because my intention was to, in effect, pull out every pertinent strand within the data and should those "miscellaneous" codes start to join together then that itself might develop a new theme.

Step 3: Searching for themes

In thematic analysis, a theme is defined as a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept. These themes were identified from the data, under the influence of the research questions which I maintained throughout the process. Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) describe this as "a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon" through "pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis." (ibid. p.82). Xu & Zammit (2020) describe how "relevant codes could be sorted, collated and combined to organise an overarching theme" (Xu & Zammit, 2020. p.6)

For the most part, where I noticed elements within the codes which associated them, for instance the running metaphors in my language describing lessons (see next chapter) and the student emphasis on *explanation* as a synonym of sorts for teaching. Codes began to gather together until they achieved some form of coherence.

Theme >	**Codes >**	**Examples**
Language emergence	Method (how language emerges)	Plenary provided jumping off points Need for structure…can't just be open Developed out of reforming and rephrasing what students were struggling to say

		The need arose [for] prune, cut back and dead head.
	Sources of language	Activity grew into big discussion of fun/new vocab Pictures…good prompts for new language Listening provided the vocab [student] looked up demonstrate

Table 4 - Theme development from codes

The themes I identified early on were more clearly linked to the research questions - this is perhaps inevitable given that the initial codes were themselves based on those questions. Subsequent themes were identified from the emergent, deductive codes by linking together commonalities between identified areas in the data. (See Appendix 5 for further examples.)

Step 4: Reviewing Themes

Following this process, I then reviewed the themes. It is tempting to see this as a sequential process - certainly in the description of the "steps" in this way, but in reality I identified and reviewed themes as an iterative and reflexive process. While mapping the codes to each theme, I became aware of other themes, distinct and separate from the initial themes that I had identified. This then led to a subsequent review of the data and the coding to identify further examples of the themes. The theme of language emergence, for instance, gave rise to observations in the data about the nature of the language that I used to describe the course content, leading to a theme around "language as a participant in the course" reflecting the language I used to describe the course content.

Step 5 Defining & Naming Themes

Again, this was a reflective, ongoing process - as themes were identified in the data, they were named and defined for ease of understanding, and in order to avoid overlap (Xu & Zammit, 2016, p. 7). This element was very much written into the thesis as I developed the research, and

is reflected in the final report (Step 6 of Braun & Clarke's (2006) stages). Themes were constantly reviewed and updated until a satisfactory analysis of the data could be identified, a process which continued throughout the research and even into the writing up stages, where the *act* of writing enabled even greater insights into what had been uncovered in the research.

Trustworthiness

There are disadvantages to such an approach; among other things it is a less well researched data analysis method which could be problematic – as a relatively early career researcher, there is a risk that I may misinterpret or misapply the processes. There is also danger that any themes I identify may lack consistency or coherence. Nowell et al. (2016) suggest a framework which can support me in this, and suggest that the incoherence and inconsistencies can be at least partly ameliorated by "making explicit an epistemological position that can coherently underpin" (p.2) any claims that I may make. (Interestingly Nowell et al. (ibid.) here describe the claims made as "empirical" which perhaps reflects the context of their paper in medical practice, a field dominated by approaches common to natural sciences, rather than social sciences.)

In the context of this research, and in consideration of the above, I argue that the advantages of a thematic analysis outweigh these disadvantages. As noted above, this project draws on a range of different types of data and thematic analysis is flexible enough that it can be used across these different data sets to draw together common themes and concepts. It is also consistent with the "softer" view of data suggested by the critical-interpretivist research methodology used to gather the data.

If done rigorously and carefully, it can "produce trustworthy and insightful findings" (Nowell et al. 2017. p. 2) which requires the application of trustworthiness criteria, first outlined by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and summarised neatly by Nowell et al. (2016). These are: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*.

In order that the study be *credible* it is important that the data provided fits the interpretation applied to it. The data types should fit the questions being researched, and any assumptions drawn are reinforced through "prolonged engagement, persistent observation, data collection triangulation, and researcher triangulation" (Nowell et al. 2016. p.3). In order to achieve this, I used *member checking* during the process of data analysis. This often took the form of sharing my observations with my students so that they could confirm (or not) the accuracy of my own observations. Often this took the very practical form of evaluating lessons and summarising

content with students at the end of lessons, which fitted well with the overall stance of the research and the curriculum being explored as it is a participatory act, as well as enhancing the language of the participants through the reading practice.

Data analysis should also be *transferable*. In order to achieve this, I make use of "thick descriptions" (Wang, 2016) so that other teachers and researchers can also look at the research and be able to draw the same or broadly similar conclusions. This research is heavily contextualised, of course, and issues around the subjectivity of the study have already been discussed, but it is worth reiterating that I make no claims herein to generalisability: rather through this research practice I am looking to influence only the specific context of my own research. The data is potentially limited in its transferability and the thick descriptions will allow others to identify how their own experiences may coincide with my own. These others may be researchers, of course, but more importantly for me as a practitioner-researcher, that is, a working teacher still working full time in the FE sector, I hope that the content and discoveries made during this research resonate for other *teachers* so that they can identify whether or not the ideas and approaches explored herein will work in their particular context.

Dependability is the act of ensuring my own research process is "logical, traceable and clearly documented" (ibid.) This is so that when any readers review the process, they can see that the process has developed an "audit trail" showing how I have made decisions and on both theoretical and methodological issues. In this case, for example, I have already justified my data collection methods, and outlined a methodological stance based in critical theory and making use of qualitative methods. The pedagogical justification of the curriculum activities has also been argued through chapters one and two, arguing that the status quo of curriculum design in ESOL is flawed and in need of re-evaluation, suggesting an alternative method of developing the curriculum.

The final criteria listed in Nowell et al. is *Confirmability*. It is crucial that the interpretations and conclusions drawn from the data are very easily identifiable as being derived from it. It is necessary, then, for the researcher to identify how they have come to the conclusions, so that others can understand the decision-making process. Nowell et al. draw on Lincoln & Guba (1985) in explaining how this is achieved when the other three trustworthiness criteria are achieved.

Data Analysis - a Brief Summary

There were, then, three key sets of data, analysed differently in line with the nature of the data and how it was to be used. Both used a form of coding, but the syllabus data was more easily coded deductively and annotated accordingly and illustrated with examples. The more narrative, long form data used a more mixed inductive-deductive approach using a thematic analysis, and the open-endedness afforded by this enabled a more complex discussion of the observations and concepts involved, and it is onto those findings and observations which we shall now move.

Chapter 5 - Findings

> It might, or might not, have helped Anathema get a clear view of things if she'd been allowed to spot the very obvious reason why she couldn't see Adam's aura. It was for the same reason that people in Trafalgar Square can't see England.
>
> – Terry Pratchett & Neil Gaiman, Good Omens

Introduction

Having identified the issue, that the current ESOL curriculum model is an inaccurate reflection of language learning, and proposed an alternative, which I explored through the course of an academic year, we now turn to reviewing the findings from the data. The process of data analysis was reviewed in the previous chapter, while in this chapter I will review the data itself and report on the findings thereof. This will start with an explanation of the course itself, and begin with a description of a simple classroom activity before then moving into a section by section review of the findings, organised by theme and topic, and then further organised within those themes by data source. This will then provide a basis for a more detailed discussion in chapter 6.

In order to set the scene for the course, we will first look at an activity which helped to define the thematic content of the course, before moving on to review the syllabus content and the methods which gave rise to this content. This review codes the lesson content based on the language arising, and how it arose in the lessons and across the course, illustrated and expanded with more quantitative narrative evaluation of individual lessons. This will then lead to a review of the findings from my own reflections and the learner feedback analysed thematically.

Starting the Course

At the beginning of the course, we carried out a "topics" activity, based loosely on Cardiff et al. (2007, p.10) although using a structure linked to cumulative speaking activities in e.g. Klippel (1984) and Ur (1981). In this activity the students were presented with a range of themes / topics for the lessons for the year as a PowerPoint slide. The students then went through a process of selecting which were the key topics of interest/importance for them. With this list, they then worked with a partner to negotiate a shortlist of 5 topics which they both agreed on. This list

was then shared with another pair, again, reducing the shared list of topics/themes to 5 per group of 4. Each group then shared their list with the whole group, with a collective discussion leading to 5 key themes to be covered across the academic year. As a group, the list was prioritised according to individual preference.

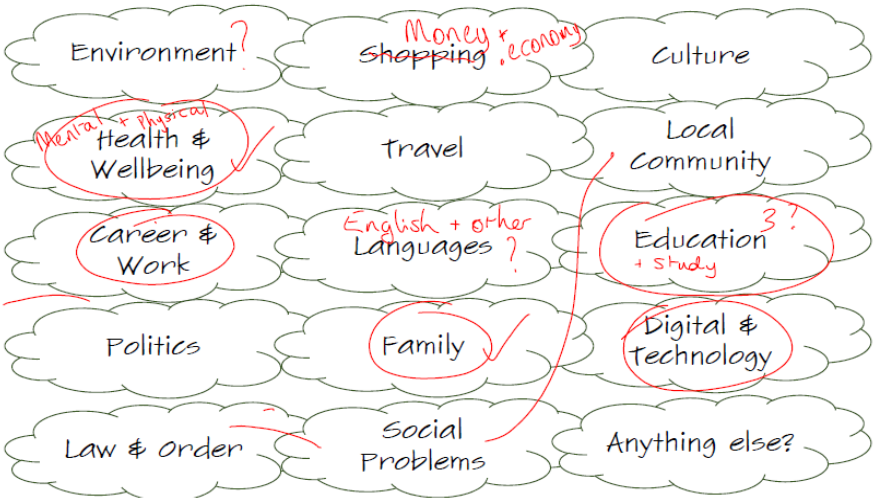


Figure 6 Interactive whiteboard - Topics

The topics presented were as displayed in figure 6. This is a screenshot of an interactive whiteboard which also shows how the negotiation process adapted some of the topics. For example, in the discussion on "shopping" the emphasis was very clearly on a question of finance and economic wellbeing rather than on simple transactional language (Carter & McCarthy, 1997) . Considering the level of the group, this is unsurprising – students at Level 2 ESOL should be more than capable of linguistically managing most physical and virtual shopping experiences. This allowed the students to engage meaningfully in the negotiation of the course content. I was very aware of the limitations of negotiating beyond this, for example the issues identified in Slembrouck, (2000) around student understanding and willingness to engage, and the observations recorded above in students' ability to accurately identify their own shortcomings. I suspected, as well, although this remains only conjectural, that if given a list of specific language, or functions, such as in the activity described in Meddings & Thornbury (2009, p.75) where students make use of a curriculum document to identify their own needs, the general consensus would have likely been "all of it" and required extensive explanations. Certainly, the student reflections support the notion that students' linguistic self-awareness is more limited.

Figure 7 Final Topics

The outcome of the final topic negotiation is shown in Fig. 7, which placed “Career & Work” as a key priority on the course.

The Course Content

The Skills Spread

As we saw in chapter 1, when discussing language teaching, and language-based curriculum design, the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking are crucial. In the case of this class, for example, the students’ final exams are framed around these four skills – a reading exam, a writing exam and a speaking & listening exam. It is worth noting here that skills were rarely practised fully independently of one another. A speaking task often arose from the content of a reading task, for example, and listening as a non-discrete skill is almost always linked to speaking.

The most extensively practised skill on the course was speaking; indeed, some aspect of speaking “practice” occurred in every lesson. As Baynham et al (2007) noted “talk is work in the ESOL classroom” (p.8). However, this was recorded as a focus when it was used or given as a specific activity for its own value, rather than necessarily as a stage in relation to another activity. For example, speaking as a part of “comparing answers with your partner” wasn’t recorded as speaking, but “discuss with your partner about…” was. Even bearing this in mind, however, speaking formed the focus of almost half of the lessons, often with vocabulary and grammar development arising from these. To take a typical example of this, on 11th March, an activity where the students reviewed images of people in different forms of education, identified what they could see in the images, and the value/role of those forms, as well as their own personal relations to the experiences of the people in the images, led (perhaps predictably) to the range of language items arising (some new and some revised) illustrated in figure 8.

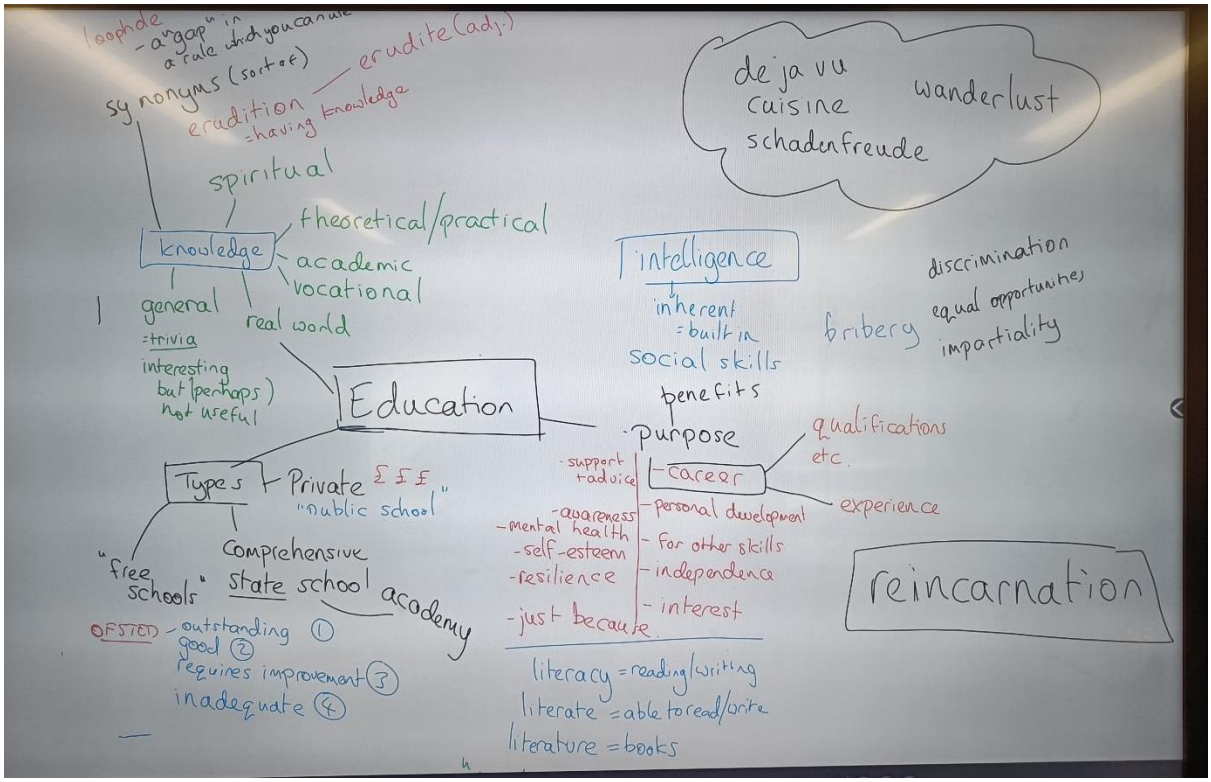


Figure 8 Whiteboard 11/03/2022

The focus of the language was quite clear: the majority of the language items had a clear link to the theme of education and knowledge. There was also evidence of some structural elements, for example word formation in the discussion of “literacy/literate/literature” and “erudite/erudition”.

Of the other skills, listening was the least *explicitly* practised, i.e. listening to a formally recorded text. Only 7 lessons out of the 51 annotated included an explicit focus on listening. With the exception of a dictogloss - “a classroom dictation activity where learners are required to reconstruct a short text by listening and noting down key words, which are then used as a base for reconstruction.” (British Council, n.d.)) These were also all based on materials developed externally to the course, e.g. published texts or online activities. In some, but not all, of these cases, the materials used were inauthentic, i.e. designed and graded for in class use, as opposed to naturally occurring texts which have not been adapted to meet student language levels, usually referred to as “authentic texts” (e.g., Hedge, 2000, p.67) although arguably their use as a pedagogical resource is inauthentic – (Van Lier, 1996, p.125). One instance of this type of lesson was based around a listening task on personality types in September 2021 (Craven, 2004. p.14), where students listened to a recording of someone describing the outcomes of a fictional personality test. However even these inauthentic texts generated opportunities for

fairly complex discussions and for vocabulary development *beyond* that used and needed in the tasks.

Completing the listening activity, for example, required the following vocabulary (fig. 9)

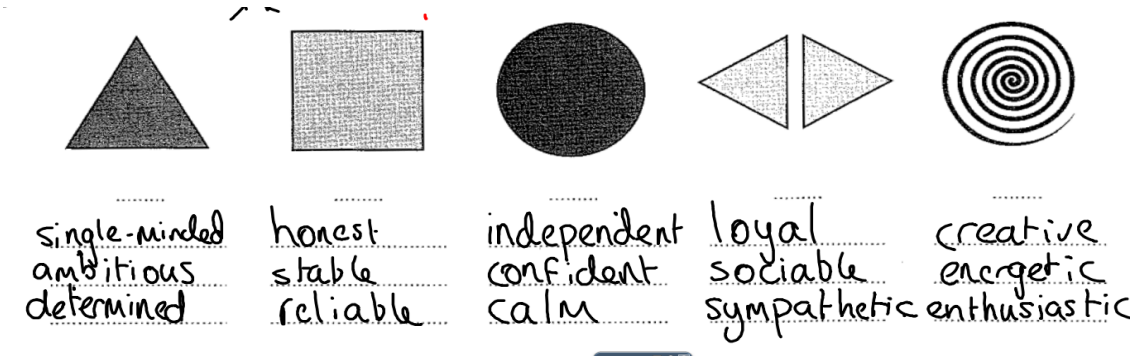


Figure 9 Craven, 2004, p.14, used on 9th September 2021

However, in activities leading up to and following the listening task, a much wider and more student focussed set of language arose:

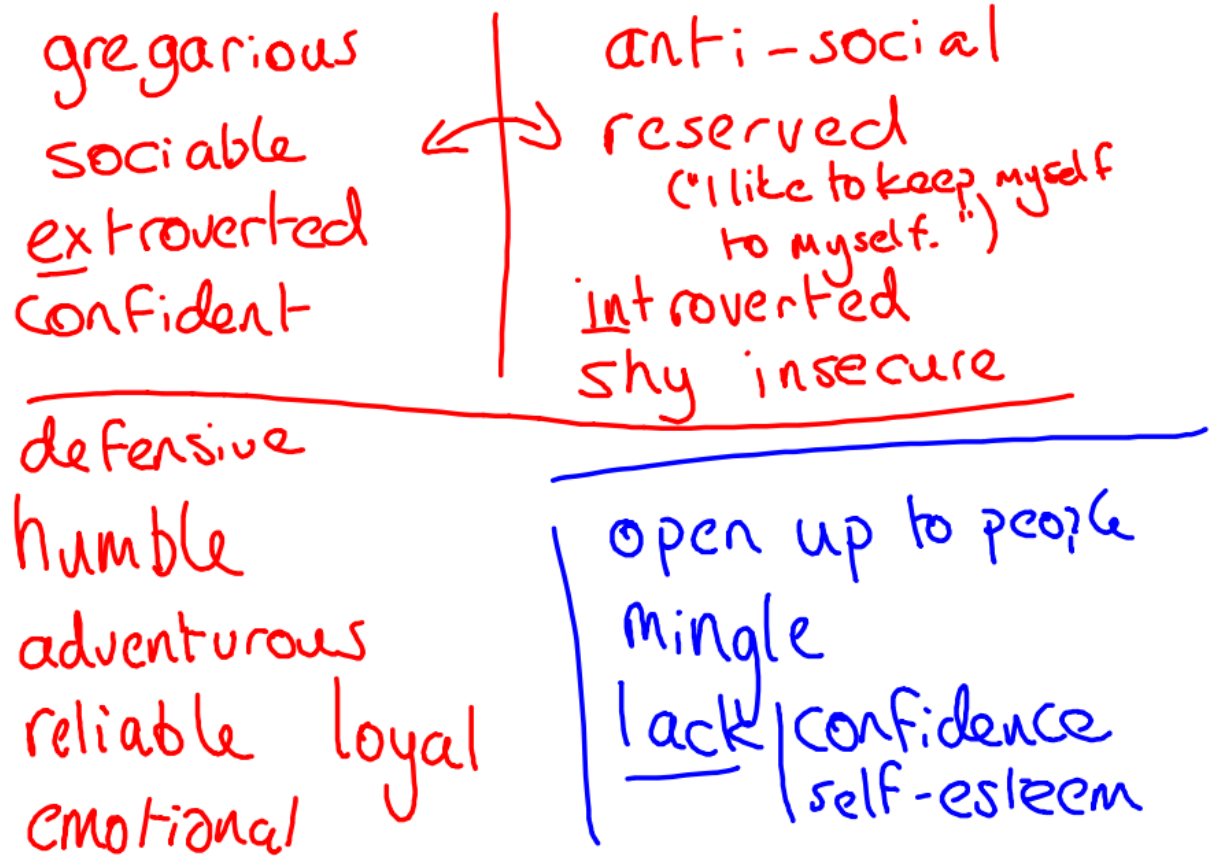


Figure 10 Emergent Language from listening task

As we saw in the lesson on education, the language emerging moved beyond simply "meaning" into a more pattern-led range of vocabulary – there are examples of idiomatic language ("keep

myself to myself") of word building ("extroverted/introverted, self-esteem, anti-social") and of collocation ("open up to", "lack confidence"). So while these lessons were ostensibly materials led, the emergent language moved beyond those materials. However, the question of listening perhaps remains here: what opportunities and barriers exist in terms of developing discrete listening skills such as listening for details, comprehension, etc.

Reading represented a far larger proportion of the lessons – 16 lessons focussed on reading, and therefore a corresponding number of lessons were described as "text led", that is stemming from the content and themes of a text. There is a slight discrepancy here – two lessons I described as "text led" developed slightly differently. One of these was the dictogloss activity mentioned above, which develops from a simultaneously spoken and written text, and the other was a follow-on from a text-led lesson which highlighted a specific grammar item which students wanted to know more about.

Unlike the lessons focussing on listening as a skill, only one or two lessons with a reading focus were based on published materials. Instead, almost all of the lessons with a reading focus were based on authentic texts extracted from real world examples: articles, websites, a social media thread and so on. Fairly early on, I asked and encouraged students to bring in examples of "real" texts from their own lives, but in practice this simply didn't happen, despite regular reminders. Therefore, the selection of texts fell to me as the teacher. Texts were largely selected on the following criteria:

- **Relevance** – is the text relevant to the students' lives & motivations?
- **Interest** – is the text likely to be interesting to students for another reason?
- **Accessibility** – is the text understandable by the students?
- **Range** – does it help expose students to a range of text types and language forms/features.
- **Opportunity** – are there opportunities for further language to emerge from the text?

Early on in the process, I researched a range of activities from a range of sources (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009; Auerbach, 1992; Campbell & Kryszemska, 1992; Rivers, 1988; Deller, 1990; Cardiff, et al, 2008; Morgan, 1998). Many of these books are relatively old perhaps due to an industry focus in English language teaching shifting from the learner to a more commodified approach where publishers could maximise their income by promoting course books with increasingly complex elements, including a supplementary work book, teacher's guide book, student and teacher cassettes or CDs, photocopiable resource packs and more, later

consolidated by the ready availability of computer-assisted language learning, initially via physical media, but later through web based resources. Indeed, it was against this deeply technological approach that Thornbury argued for his *dogme* ELT approach in 2000, rejecting the accoutrements and a return to a 'state of grace' where students were valued as the resource and the lesson. I pulled these together into a guide (fig.11) which I could use to develop tasks for reading with minimal planning and preparation so that a text could be used quickly and responsively, rather than the development of the activities creating a delay, thus losing the sense of immediacy and interest.

Reading texts in phase 1, then, consisted of a wide variety of authentic texts. The selected texts were generally long enough to on 1-2 sides at 12 point text – 400-600 words long. Meddings & Thornbury are quite insistent on texts which are "the shorter the better" (p.49) but for the purposes of this course and for the students, more extensive reading opportunities were needed. This length balanced the criteria of range with accessibility; long enough to include sufficient variety of language for the students to be exposed to a range of language and text experiences, but not so long that the text was off-putting for students.

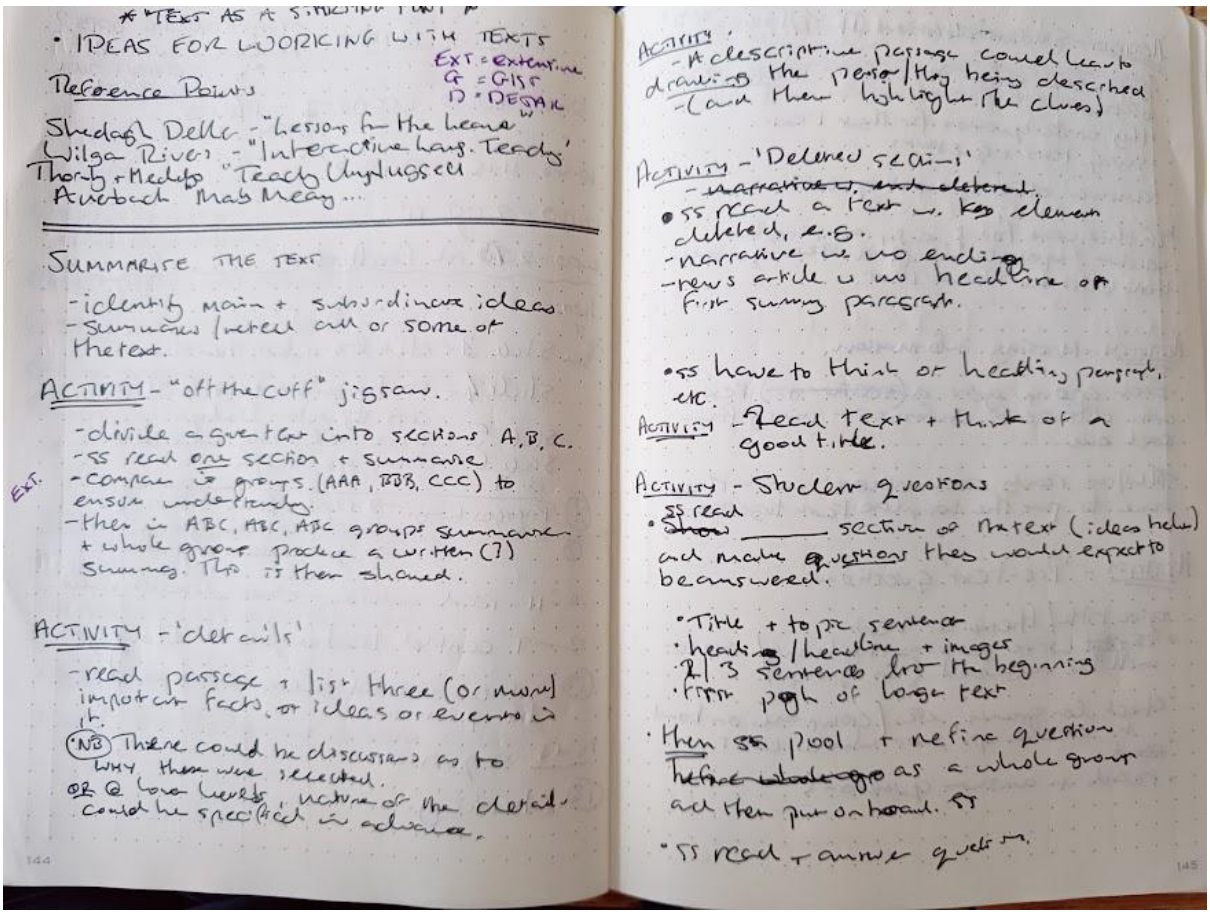


Figure 11 "Any Text" Reading Activities

Texts used were as follows:

1. A serious magazine/web article on multilingualism
2. A light online article “Did you know this about English”
3. A booklet on how to improve your mental health
4. A short text written by me on how I improved my own health
5. Inauthentic Text – armistice day celebrations
6. UN Sustainability Goals Website
7. An article on setting up a coat exchange for the homeless
8. A page from a cookbook describing how to make a Christmas Cake
9. An article on why New Years Resolutions fail
10. An article (metro) on an initiative to introduce a 4 day working week
11. A leaflet about Children’s Mental Health Week
12. A selection of pages from Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls
13. A council leaflet about the cost of living council tax rebate
14. A social media thread (from Twitter) by Jack Monroe on the rising cost of shopping

15. A website with information about courses
16. A news article about the death of David Bowie
17. An article about text messages
18. An article about international perceptions of British people
19. An article about summer solstice traditions
20. Texts from reading exam practice papers
21. A full newspaper (Metro, 14/02/2022)

The texts were often taken from online sources: a pragmatic rather than pedagogically informed decision, as it is easier to locate and develop texts for classroom use from a digital source. Some of these were clearly intended as print pieces (texts 3, 11, 18 & 19) whereas others were specifically online and presented as such (texts 14 & 15). Others were print texts copied directly from the source material (text 8, text 12), and others were "found" texts, that is, texts which were simply picked up and used as is (text 13, text 21). The only "genuine" texts, in the sense that the students interacted with them in the way in which they were intended (Van Lier, 1996; Breen 1985), were those at the end of the course in mock exams.

Texts were chosen because of their immediate relevance to the theme (see above) or to events in the wider world – for example Text 13 was immediately relevant as it linked to an important piece of information which directly affected students' lives. Others linked to wider events and notable "weeks" – including the Children's Mental Health leaflet (text 11) which linked to a national recognition event, or the article on NY Resolutions, which was timed around the return of the students to college in the new calendar year (text 9).

Some of the texts had distinctly inauthentic activities linked to them – texts 15, 16 and 17, for instance, were found texts but which had tasks directly linked to the demands of the exam. The text written by me (text 4) was authentic in terms of its writing (I didn't moderate or control my own use of language in the text) but inauthentic in purpose and type. It was a text without a discernible "type" (e.g. article, leaflet, etc.) or genre, meaning that the focus was purely on the message, rather than the medium.

Two of the texts emerged from student based discussions in the classroom, and none were actively contributed by students. The *Cost of Living* leaflet led to a discussion in class of the ways in which prices had increased, and which prices had increased, which led to my showing the first tweet that I had seen the day before. This then led to a wider discussion, leading to the full Twitter thread being used the next day. The other text which arose from a classroom

interaction was the Christmas Cake recipe, which came up in an informal, tangential conversation in which the students asked me to share the recipe I used. It was, perhaps, a teacher's decision to approach the text as a learning opportunity, rather than simply approaching the text in an authentic way, i.e. simply sharing it with the students as one might a recipe with a friend or colleague.

Vocabulary and Grammar

As observed in chapter 1, vocabulary is largely overlooked and glossed over in the AECC document. In the tally of lessons, vocabulary dominated the syllabus with over half of all lessons as a main focus. As with speaking, however, it is likely that new vocabulary items arose in other lessons as well. As noted above, the role of vocabulary in language learning cannot be underestimated in its importance in both communication and comprehension (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.61). Vocabulary was often more personalised and personalis*able* in the lessons – the vocabulary emerging usually linked to the student questions, discussions and frequently through the process of recasting and rephrasing for students in order to enable effective or more appropriate communication (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). When it emerged, it was often a mixture of individual words and longer chunks of language – collocations and so on, which echoes the conclusions of Gallen (2014) who argued that

> If we can help our students to process language in patterns, beyond word level, we can not only improve the fluency and complexity of their speaking, but also their ability to process texts more efficiently.
>
> (Gallen, 2015, p.3)

The emergent syllabus, then, was frequently a lexical syllabus (Lewis, 1993), but maintained a noticeable grammatical element. Where grammar emerged or was explicitly taught was focus of 20 of the lessons, slightly fewer than half of all lessons. It was usually linked to some other element, most frequently a text (see above) but on one or two occasions came directly from student requests. In one lesson, for instance, an extensive discussion on present perfect (a structure used to link present outcomes with past events, e.g. *I have had my hair cut*. *I have just been to the shops*. *I have lived in Leeds since 2009*.) arose from a direct student question about an error made by another student – a rare occurrence of students negotiating a specific linguistic item – a limited version of the linguistic negotiations described in Breen & Littlejohn, 2000.

Other student-requested grammar points arose from discussions in the lessons – again focussing on tenses, leading to an explicit request for coverage of specific narrative tenses. The lessons which followed maintained a more open and exploratory nature – rather than simply direct input > practice, the lessons which followed made use of a short film for the students to describe retrospectively, and then followed up with a narrative based dictogloss task the week after. The open nature of these lessons still included space for a discussion of similes and their uses and meanings. Again, while grammar may have been the more explicit focus, the freer,

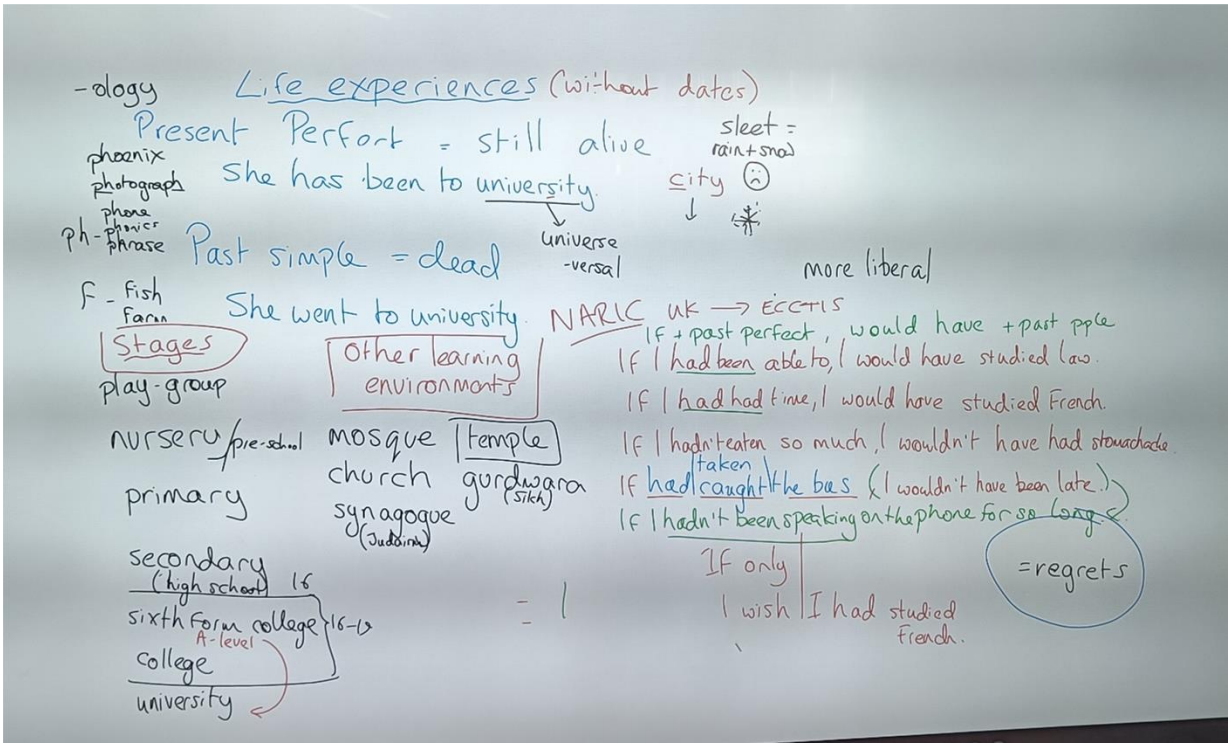


Figure 12 Whiteboard - 31-03-22

more fluid nature of the lesson led to developing awareness of more than simply grammar. This seems logical, particularly where the lexical and grammatical syllabuses are tied into the textual and interactional elements of the course. Language items were rarely taught in isolation – linking to Long (2015, p. 21) and therefore arose when students' interlanguage was more likely to be ready, more effectively enabling uptake. Because of the nature of language being off the cuff, explicit instruction of language items, that is simply telling students and then questioning them afterwards remained the most frequent occurrence in these lessons, in line with Lightbown & Spada (2013) describing studies where "elicitations and metalinguistic feedback not only resulted in more uptake, but they were also more likely to lead to a corrected form of the original utterance." (2013, p.141). The language input very much followed this model – students spoke, received explicit feedback and input and then returned to the activity.

How does language emerge from lessons?

One of the key questions of this research was to identify how the language emerges from the classroom interactions. Often these were simply out of error correction – rectifying language from students.

In a lesson in which the class completed an activity where they produced a class timeline of educational experiences, the whiteboard record of that day showed the following grammatical structures emerging – present perfect (contrasted with past simple) and third conditional. These were a natural enough fit to the theme of the lesson. In these cases, however, my reflections from the day showed that these emerged from students identifying something in my own language – perhaps through my modelling the grammar for the context.

Present perfect, for example, arose from a simple introduction to the theme of the lesson:

> *Start of lesson: annojnced [sic] theme of lesson "Education experiences we have had" and [S7] asked why did I use [sic] present perfect. Quickly demonstrated with sentences "I have been to university" means I am still alive, "I went to university" finished (e.g. I am dead).*
>
> *(Reflection 31-03-22)*

The third conditional (*If I had known, I would have called you*), often used to describe regrets and alternate pasts arose from a passing comment on my own experiences – my notes from the day were as follows:

> *I shared how I regretted not doing French at A level and said "I wish I had done French, not sociology" and [S7] asked "why not "did"? so I led a teacher led moment on 3rd conditional, If only and I wish. This became quite structured with an explanation which then led to formal practice by starting a sentence "If I hadn't eaten so much…" and students called out ideas. Then I did the second clause and got ss to work independelty [sic] to complete the sentence "_____ I wouldn't have been late". Mostly predictable responses but [S6] asked "Can I say 'If I hadn't been speaking on the phone…". Really nice surprise.*

(Reflection 31-03-22)

This suggests that the students were developing an awareness of language, and noticing structures around them, as well as the development in the lesson of a culture where students felt confident and comfortable enough to put forward questions.

The board from that lesson also showed that the language was deeply rooted to the context (education and learning, including religious learning) but also incidental elements linking to the weather of the day (sleet), to progression opportunities (NARIC, now ENIC), elements of morphology (*university/universal/universe*). These things were often surprising – for example the morphology and phonology arising in this lesson were unpredictable:

> *This led to a question from [S10] "why is it s in university not c" so explained about the origins of the words, consolidated explanation by asking students to think about difference between "ph" and "f" (science, studies, etc.) and then students started to suggest other ideas ("technology" "chemistry" etc.)*

Notice that I recorded "students started to suggest" rather than simply "I elicited".

In the same lesson, I recorded as well extensive discussions amongst the students, leading to a wide range of language, themes and topics, some only loosely based on the 'official' theme of the lesson. Discussions not recorded on the whiteboard included the following:

- *Sweat shop* – linked to a conversation about starting your own business
- *Banter, pull someone's leg* – from a slightly close to the bone discussion in a group discussing the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine with the Russian student. This included a little bit of defusing on my part.
- The difference between *too early* and *so early* as in *"Why did you send your children to school ___ early?"*
- *Prestige language* – from a discussion about the role of English in Pakistani universities
- *make it up/work it out as you go along* and *trial and error* in a discussion around learning to cook as children.

There was a clear emphasis on the chunking described by Gallen (2015) and the socially situated language described in Winstanley & Cooke (2016) where language arose in contexts linked to power imbalance, students' personal lives and aspirations.

My final reflections, and the lesson materials and whiteboards from the following lesson, show that the discussion of the grammar in this lesson led directly to a formal lesson on third conditionals. This followed a more traditional approach to the lesson design – teacher input followed by student practice; but again, as noted above, there remained a place in these lessons for explicit instruction, with a focus on form going some way to achieving "a symbiotic relationship between explicit and implicit learning, instruction and knowledge." (Long, 2015, p.27).

This sequence of lessons followed an open-ended approach, with the language emerging from a structured task with its own essential communicative aim – Long's Focus on Form, but also Thornbury (2005) describing grammar as a psychological process, rather than simply a list of memorisable knowledge. Other lessons and sequences developed from similarly structured tasks, for example the initial "getting to know you" lesson, using an activity where students developed an "identity pizza" where a circle was divided into segments which represented the students' lives/interests/values. This led to work on language around comparing and describing. In all of these lessons, activities were purposefully planned and predefined as activities, but without specific outcomes, and planning was often a series of options, rather than a fixed pathway. A sequence of lessons on gratitude, which later did include an inauthentic listening task, was planned as follows, for instance:

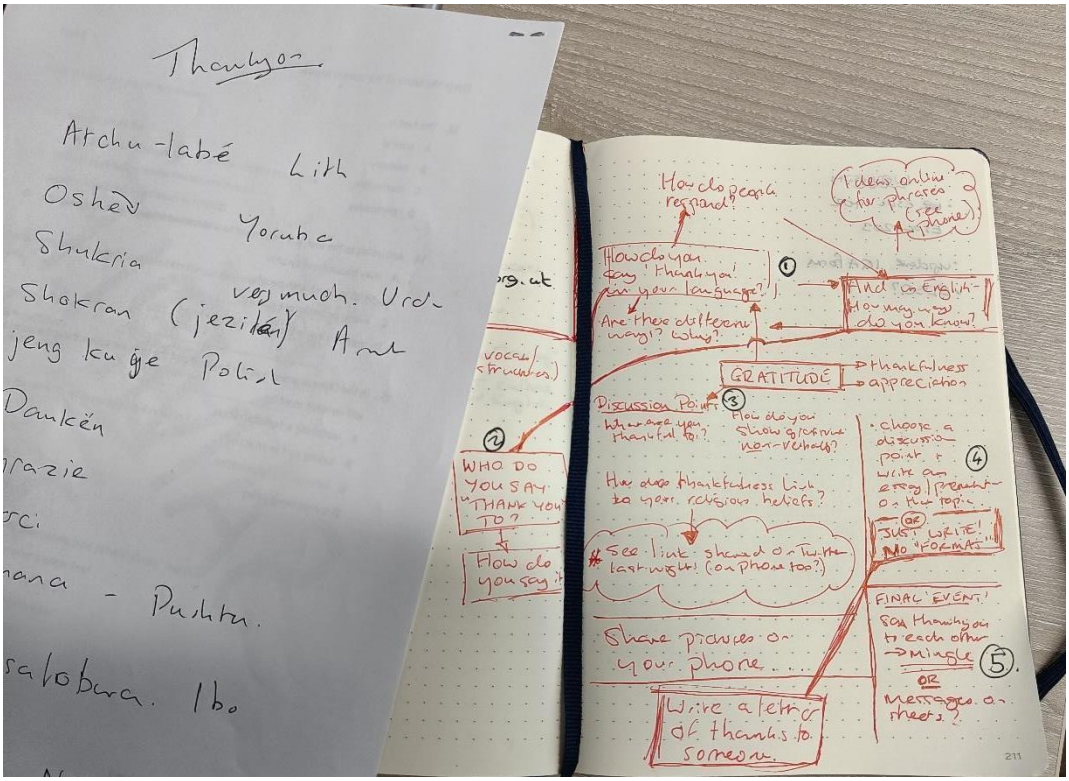


Figure 13 Lesson Plan for "thank you" lesson

In this example, the plan was written as a mind map, with the numbers recording a potential sequence within a lesson. As well as leading to emergent language items, the activity led to specific language skills development in a more directed way – a listening lesson based on an inauthentic text, and writing based on the theme of gratitude.

Other lessons demonstrated language emerging from conversation. Early on in the course, the students were discussing a current news story relating to a fuel shortage. This was an issue which lent itself to the process of *problematising* (e.g. Bryers, 2013, Auerbach, 1992, Freire, 1972) where the issue could be discussed and analysed, then responded to in an active manner. The conversation was free flowing at the beginning of the lesson, so I took the opportunity to develop the arguments and the issues further. I posed simple questions to the students one by one:

1. *What has happened to the fuel?*
2. *How does it affect us and other people?*
3. *What could we do about it?*

Question 1 was the most productive. We were able to link the notion of "panic-buying" back to discussions around the coronavirus lockdown when people also panic-bought items such as

toilet roll and pasta. Students were trying to explain: in my notes from the session I recorded a student as saying: “they buy but they don’t need. They are worried.” The whiteboards from that session show that the focus then shifts from the topic to the notion of “rumours” and “fake news” – a contribution from a student when I asked why people panic-bought things. Other students wanted clarification on the meaning – “Is this like gossip?” Figure 14 shows how this evolved into collocational language “juicy gossip” “snide comments” “two-faced” “back-biting” – all evolving from student queries and clarifications over the subtleties of meaning involved.

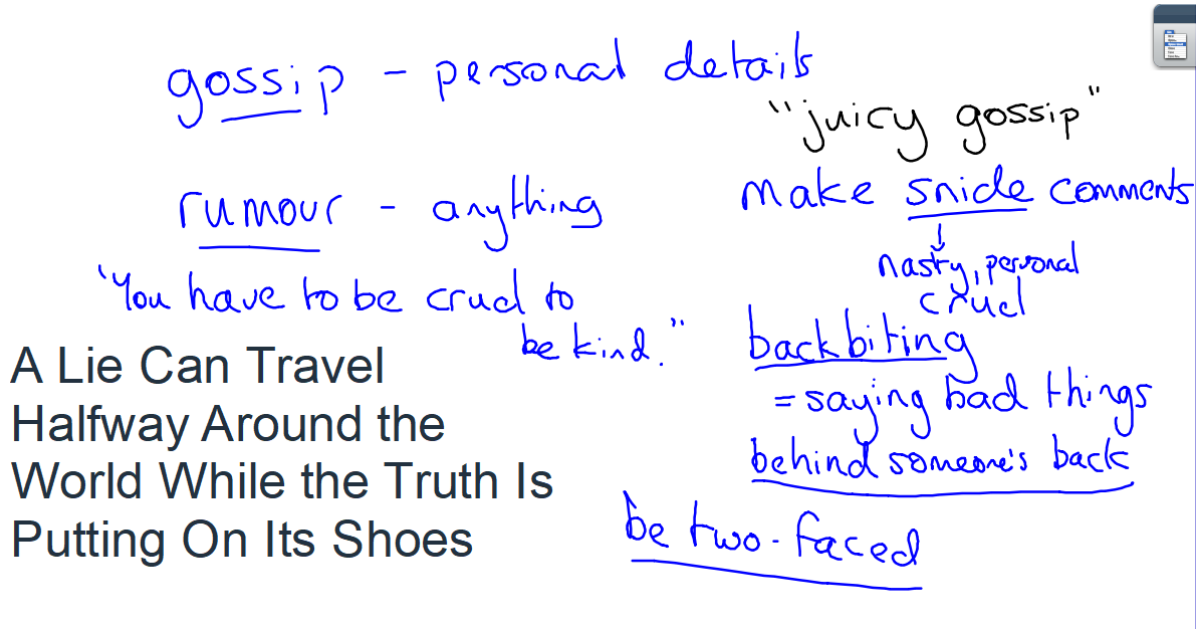


Figure 14 Whiteboard October 2021

That last item, interestingly, arose over later in a lesson, with [S9], using it to describe a neighbour’s behaviour, and then, at my raised eyebrows of surprise “You remember that? Last year?”

The final question led to discussions around car use with students taking an approach of personal action and individual change, rather than activist, political change, but led to a need for idiomatic conditional forms – “if need be” “if absolutely necessary” “if possible”.

Such problematising also occurred from more immediate and local concerns – off the cuff complaints about the quality of the food and the experiences in the college canteen, for example, led to lessons on students planning, drafting and writing emails to the head of college catering services, which were subsequently sent by the students to the appropriate member of staff. While perhaps not a question of great social importance, this is not unlike the lessons

described in Auerbach (1992), Cardiff et al. (008) and in Bryers, et al. (2013), where students use the lessons to take direct action. In this case it was successful: the emails led to the catering team in taking up at least one of the frequent requests from students.

These discussions from passing comments were often incredibly productive – in one lesson, S4 was talking about benefits fraud before the lesson began and said, "all Asian people commit benefit fraud." There were several issues to unpick here. The student in question was herself from Pakistan, and my immediate concern related to issues around stereotyping and discrimination. These themes, however, themselves provided a rich seam of language to unpick. In order to make the inappropriateness of the comment clear, I asked the question "Do you mean that *every* Asian person commits fraud?" and this led, perhaps predictably, to some backtracking and therefore, of course, to a need to rephrase and recast (Thornbury & Meddings, 2009) the statement. In this case, however, the recasting was not due to the language (which was correct) but rather to the social content of the utterance. From this point, the following language emerged through dialogue between me and the various members of the class on a broad theme of fraud and financial crime:

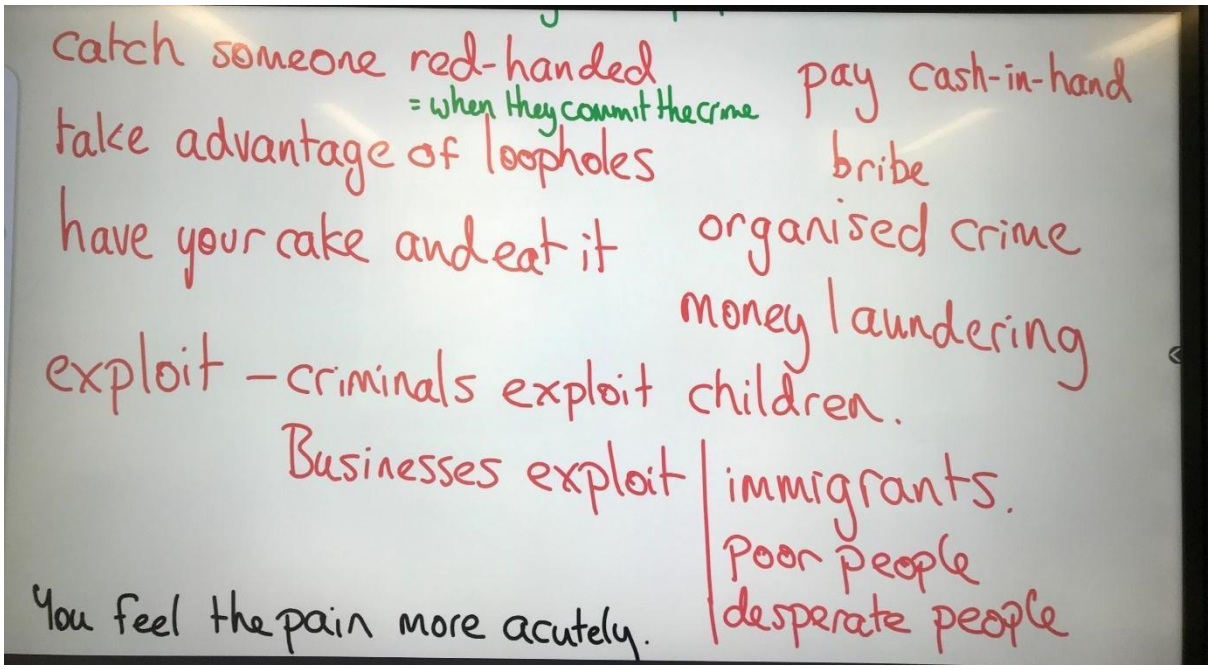


Figure 15 Whiteboard 07/01/2022

Language also emerged from texts, as noted above. This was sometimes simply language directly drawn from the text, but also in *response* to a text. Text 21, a full newspaper, was chosen as a text for the lesson and made use of a simple structure – shortly before the lesson I highlighted a range of details from throughout the newspaper and wrote these on the board. The

students then had to read through the newspaper to find and write the details into their own sentences. As a result, the initial reading activity evolved into something beyond simply comprehending the information, and began to develop the students' own language in a productive sense. Here language was much more closely linked to student errors: students re-writing or summarising key points in a text, for example, rather than simply quoting a line. The finished products from this were fairly simple summaries of details:

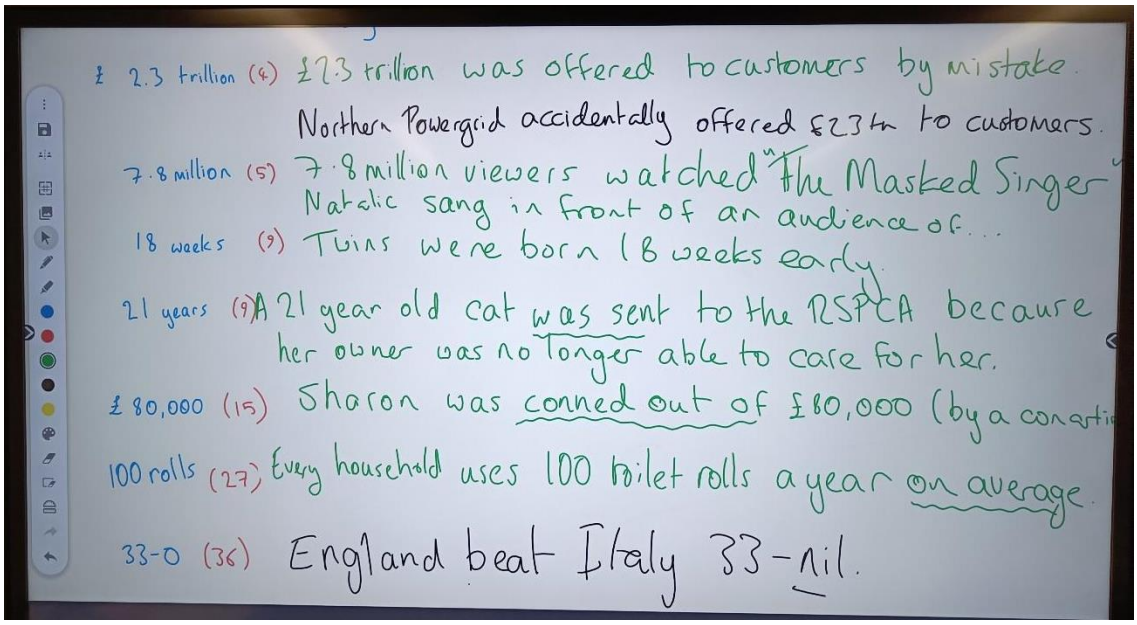


Figure 16 Whiteboard 14/02/2022

This led into two subsequent lessons. As can be seen from the screenshot (fig. 16), an obvious grammatical structure which arose was that of passive voice, which can be difficult to contextualise. A small amount of direct explanation took place in the lesson (note the first example where the passive has been rewritten as the active to illustrate the form and the *reasons* for using passive voice) but there was a general consensus among the class that we follow this language up in a subsequent lesson. However, before that, after a busy morning of analysing and discussing grammar, we made a radically different use of the texts, which was done purely as an unevaluated fluency task: students used the newspapers and a roll of sticky tape to build the tallest towers possible. I opted to do no language focus work in this lesson and recorded no specific linguistic concerns. Although these did exist, the activity was intended for *pure* fluency rather than fluency leading to emergent language. In essence, it is sometimes good for students just to talk without having the need for finding language.

A final locus for language emergence was through the use of "inauthentic" texts – i.e. texts and activities designed for learning purposes rather than for native speaker type interaction. These

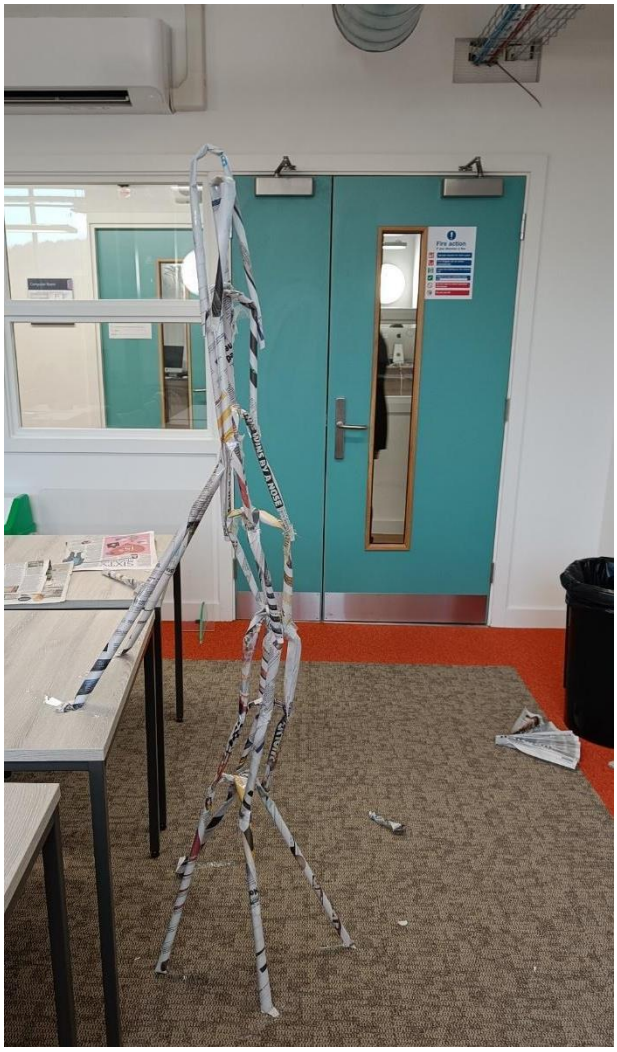


Figure 17 A newspaper tower

were rare, and consisted of short, published texts, exam materials, assessment portfolios for additional qualifications, and listening materials, although even here the recordings were often authentic with inauthentic activities. In some instances, these were texts written by me. A dictogloss activity relating a story about Easter was written in order to provide consistency for the activity (the final element of dictogloss is to compare the student produced texts with the original text, which requires that the text be the same throughout), and another was written to provide a model, but which in the end led to a systematic, if unexpected analysis of textual structure, topic sentences and discourse features. Listening texts, as observed above, were often pedagogical in focus, but consisted of both authentic texts (e.g. the gratitude listening, or a listening on women in business) but with inauthentic tasks.

Where do the lessons come from?

As part of the data analysis of the lesson content, I noted, where possible, whether the lesson focus was Student, Teacher or Other initiated.

- Student initiated – where content came from either a direct student request, or arising from student interactions in the classroom.
- Teacher-initiated – where content came from a text, topic or theme selected by the teacher.
- Other – where the content was dictated by an external source, for example additional qualifications required by the provider at the time.

The largest proportion of the lesson content was teacher-initiated (51%) although as observed above, this was usually in response to student communicative need, rather than imposed by

the teacher. A classroom event would happen (e.g. a discussion, conversation, etc.) and the selected language would fulfil a student need to communicate.

Student initiated language, on the other hand, only formed slightly more than a third of the focus of the emergent language, which perhaps links back to the notion in chapter 1 of student agency and self-evaluation and is certainly a theme in the student feedback at the end of the process.

The how and why of student and teacher-initiated lessons has been outlined already in this chapter – through the selection of texts, for example, or students requesting input or activities on a specific theme. However, the "other" remains interesting, particularly in the context of the learning, and linking back to the wider issues around ESOL and its context in a large FE college outlined in Chapter 1.

These "other" lessons fell into two categories. One was where there was a double initiation of the lesson content – from the teacher, usually, and from external "awareness" events. One lesson, for example, linked to International Women's Day, and another to Child Mental Health Week. The former made use of short biographies from *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls* (Favilli & Cavollo, 2017) while the latter linked to promotional material for the event.

The second category was from institutional requirements. As a means to draw down further funding for the course, the preceding years at the college had seen ESOL students completing additional qualifications in topics including, as in the academic year of this research, Living & Working in the UK (at Entry level 2), Preparation for Employment (also E2) and Essential Digital Skills (Entry 3). Essential Digital Skills was timetabled alongside, and threaded throughout the year, often making use of the digital facilities to work on language emerging from lessons, for example developing word processing skills with writing. The Preparation for Employment (P4E) and Living & Working in the UK (LWIUK) were timetabled as breaks in the ESOL course, but I took the decision, as did many of my colleagues, to include the content as part of the main language course.

This meant that for two specific periods, October-November 2021 (when students were timetabled for LWIUK) and March 2022 (P4E), the students were following themes dictated neither by myself nor by their own request. While these themes were relevant to the students, they were, however, presented to the students as mandatory element of the course programme. The core assessment activity was the development of a printed portfolio of activities which students completed with varying degrees of support. The portfolio was

developed by the ESOL teaching team in the college and was intended to be accessible for all students from Entry 1 upwards.

We will return to the LWIUK qualification below, but the impact of the Preparation for Employment qualification is clear in the theme of the texts and topics between February and March, where students read texts on the theme of the 4 day working week, listened to audio of female entrepreneurs and discussed the themes of career and work. However, this *was* one of the themes identified by the students at the start of the course (see figure 6 above), and while the production of the portfolio was a formal requirement, it was possible to pin wider activities around the theme of work and employment and maintain the focus on student needs and interests.

The reactions to these qualifications and the impact on the course will become clear in the analysis of my notes and reflections from the year.

Covid-19 & Other Disruptions

Almost no discussion of education between 2020 and 2023 (and indeed likely for many years to come) can be carried out without considering the impact of Covid-19 and its restrictions. The college was at this point experiencing its first year uninterrupted by any form of extensive lockdown. Some restrictions remained in the academic year of 2021-2022. Anyone who tested positive for the virus was required to stay at home until symptoms had passed and tests were consistently negative. While this affected a small number of students throughout the first two terms, the biggest significant impact was when I tested positive for covid in October 2021, and indeed felt significantly unwell for at least a week, meaning that while I was able to set work online, there was no “live” teaching either face to face or video based. As a result, the activities were very much teacher-directed and teacher-decided. In this specific case, this did coincide with the Living & Working in the UK qualification. Because of the linguistic level of the resource, students were able to more or less complete the work independently and this was set during that period. However, because the online work was patchily completed at best, this meant that time in subsequent lessons was spent on catching up and completing the portfolios.

With no little irony, the other disruption to the course was my own development as a researcher. During the same academic year, I attended research workshops away from college as a requirement of the PhD programme. As these were often, although not exclusively, on the same days as the class met, this again required that some form of asynchronous independent learning needed to be set.

Cover teaching was rare at the college, owing to staffing and funding demands. It was easy now for staff to set work online that students could complete without it impacting on their attendance on the course. This is partly the fallout of the lockdowns, where students and teachers learned very quickly to adapt to online learning, both synchronous and asynchronous, and a much greater focus being placed on online learning during induction to ensure that this is possible.

These issues, then, raise an important challenge, linked to the question of barriers to following such an approach. What is the impact if learning activities need to take place without a teacher present, and without complex group interactions? Can a cover teacher with a different philosophical framework to their pedagogical approach simply cover the lessons in the same way, or is it simply easier for the person setting the cover to revert to traditional teacher input models that are widely understood and practised for the benefit of the teacher covering? These are questions to be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Teacher Reflections

Language Emergence

While the classroom records analysed above highlight *what* language developed, there is less of a sense of *how* it developed (RQ2) detailed above. Inevitably, perhaps, the reflective notes made during the course contain a larger focus on this *how*.

What is striking from the comments in the first instance is that linguistic content and activities in the lessons was often described using very naturalistic language. This gave the impression that language simply appears out of the activities, and indeed from further activity proceeding in direct line from others. “Grow” appeared frequently as a term, for example “the first activity grew into a big discussion of fun/new vocab[ulary]”; “growing vocab” and “language grew from these discussions”. There is an interesting parallel here – perhaps a universal in how teachers approach such things, as Gallen (2014) also uses a similar metaphorical set – the teacher as a gardener (ibid. p21), and, of course, the “problem tree” in Cardiff et al (2007) and demonstrated in Winstanley & Cooke (2016). Similar language as that used in Gallen (2014) and others (Morgan, 1998, for instance), I also often described activities “becoming” something else –

> *P. looked up ‘demonstrate’ as part of a vocab capture task and found ‘negotiate’. This then became the focus of…*

I also described language as "developing out of reforming and rephrasing what students were struggling to say" which linked to the underlying ethos of the approach described above - that the input to the lessons came from filling the gaps in genuine student communicative need, rather than predetermined input. Sometimes the terms were more dramatic - a plenary "provided jumping off points" and a discussion "triggered a bigger conv[ersation]".

Language items, then, were always described in active, almost conscious terms. When describing language in lessons it was always as if the language made its own way into the lessons with phrases like "the need arose to…" "*torrential rain* came up in a lesson…" and "vocabulary tends to appear as and when it needs to". Other areas of language were often described in terms of either developing (as explained above) almost independently of the class and its members, or in terms of my supplying the language: "some added by me"; " discussion on articles and on adv-past pple adjectives e.g. highly-educated, well-thought out, etc."; "the words thus supplied, the students could then continue to explain"; "we needed to finish the work on the discourse markers so that students could have tools for the writing."

As a result there was a sense of the language having an organic, active role; something which makes its own way into the curriculum through what Long (2015) describes as a "reactive mode" (p.27) where the teacher notices and adapts to the language needed in the classroom.

Lessons were usually structured – in line with suggestions by Meddings & Thornbury (2009) and the fairly strict insistence on a structure in Cardiff, et al. (2007) and the clearly described structures in Winstanley & Cook (2016) and in the lessons described in Baynham, et al. (2007) - but always open ended in terms of linguistic items, and always with space for improvisation. My observations of lessons focussed often on the importance of openness and flexibility, but also structure, identifying on numerous occasions that lessons flowed more easily and were more productive when there was a structured element to them - a "need for structure to tasks to maximise output so to speak; can't be just open." For the most part I made decisions about the *how* of the lesson: "generative tasks lead to ideas for texts and for language"; "visual or textual prompts which create a *need* to communicate".

As well as the processes mentioned above, there were several interesting elements in the data which stand out. In one section I explained how "some [language was] added by me to help the discussion along, and some directly contributed by or asked for by the students.". I described in detail as well how specific language developed:

> *S12: I supposed to go to Pakistan*.

T: "was supposed"

S4: Is this like 'cope'?

T: No, no, what did [S12] say? What was her message?

S4: Oh like she planned but she couldn't?

S12: Yes!

This moment captured neatly the processes involved in the interactions between students and between students and teacher which lead to the language emerging. It began with a communicative need - in this case, a student describing a cancelled trip to her home country, observed or overheard by the teacher, who supplied the necessary language for communication. This was on the surface a fairly unremarkable recast method of error correction, where the language is simply passed back in the correct form, but without making specific reference to the correction. It was an automatic response – a human one, perhaps, rather than a trained response, and one which most commentators on feedback (notably, but not exclusively Long, 2015) and error correction now consider to be largely unhelpful. In this case, the activity moved on before I had chance to ensure that the correct form was noticed by the student in a useful way (Batstone, 1996, Thornbury, 1997), but, as I recorded elsewhere in the data: “that ability to fill the gap in the students’ need to communicate which causes the ‘sticking.’” A second error was then overlaid with S4’s question about “cope” (although one wonders how they came to that connection), at which point I brought it back to the original student’s point with the question “What was her message?”. This then prompted S4 to reflect on what the communicative intention was about, and at which point she captures the meaning very effectively indeed. This micro-process (repeated almost constantly throughout the course, exemplifies description of how *focus on form* functions:

> "[The student] is *vested* in the exchange, so is motivated to learn what is needed and attending to the response, already knows the meaning…she was trying to express, so has freed up attentional resources to devote to the form of the response, and hears the correct form in close juxtaposition to… her own, facilitating cognitive comparison.”
>
> (Long, 2015, p.28)

Similar incidental moments were recorded several times:

> *"[S10] & ?? discussing cooking so I brought them back on track by asking how they learned to cook. Language arose around "work it out/make it up as you go along" and "trial and error". Also overheard a conversation using "used to".*
>
> *they were teasing I good naturedly – discussion about "pull his leg" and "banter"*
>
> *one discussion…linked into gardening as a pastime, and the need arose [for the vocab] "prune" "cut back" and "deadhead"*

Incidental moments ran throughout the reflections and were as much recorded in the retrospective curriculum development and structure described above, where students responded to some form of input or stimulus, or simply to each other, and in a structured way had a need to communicate, which was clarified and discussed in partnership with the teacher.

Student Agency & Input

The notion of student agency and self-efficacy in learning is central to the philosophical underpinnings of Skills for Life (e.g. DfES, 2001) and was one of the issues which led to this research. As well as in the initial planning activity, where students identified the themes of value and interest, there were moments of student agency through the course. As described above, the students themselves *were* capable of consciously requesting explicit language teaching. It is important at this stage to remember that the students were Level 2 in ESOL terms. This means that they already had a fairly significant linguistic resource on which to draw. The majority were also experienced students of language. Most of the group were not new to college, and none were new to learning language, meaning that they had developed a degree of meta-linguistic awareness. As I observed in the notes the "basics are under control and very predictable." The other data makes it clear that the students had some knowledge of how to describe language, although in this is often limited to verb tense structures:

> *[S14] asked q abt difference between I ate / I have eaten.*
>
> *[S10] asked explicitly if we could spend an hour a week on "tenses".*
>
> *questions arose… around present continuous with "currently".*

and of course in the lesson detailed earlier in the chapter, where students asked specific questions linked to both the lesson and to unconnected elements. At times, this was described

as a two way negotiation: “Agreed at the end of the lesson that we would revisit third conditional tomorrow morning” and often as much as the students requesting, I rely on the first person plural to describe the ways in which language arises in the lessons: “we discussed women at work”; “we agreed that this would be next week’s theme”; “we only managed a couple of stages when….” and so on. This certainly suggests an emphasis on the positionality of the teacher in the classroom, and although the reflections are often in first person singular, with a clear division between “I” and “they”, there are enough “we” statements to suggest that the power relationships are shifting.

More frequently, however, student queries were linked to specific vocabulary items as highlighted above in the discussion on “supposed to”. Verb tenses (in the pedagogical sense used in most classrooms) are very commonly a systematic element of the curriculum, which perhaps is why for many language learners represent an overinflated importance. Vocabulary, of course, remained a major area of interest for students, representing the core means of expressing meaning, and again, at this level of learning, vocabulary can be taken in its broadest terms - representing the full range of lexemes in English, including idioms, collocations and phrasal verbs. This was reflected later in the elements identified by the students as things they could remember. As was shown in the evidence from the lessons themselves, these lexical elements formed the larger part of the language emerging from the course, driving the course, perhaps, to a lexical focus, rather than grammatical.

Teacher Influence

When coding these elements, I used the term “teacher *influence*”. Reflecting on this after the coding was completed, this language itself was interesting - students had *agency*, I had *influence*. This choice of words already implies the way in which power was asserted on the course when it came to developing the course content - perhaps suggesting that I subconsciously viewed my role as simply a guide on the process, and wanted students to have a more controlling or managing aspect to the course. This was, however, not so much the case when it comes to the course content.

Some of my reflections focus on the difference between an externally controlled lesson content (e.g. using pre-prepared materials such as course book and photocopiable resources.

> *When I do a “dogme” lesson I am involved/plan/think more carefully.*
>
> *When I do a book lesson I <u>actually</u> wing it.*

> *I probably plan more carefully and thoughtfully [in this approach] than on a pre-planned, resource driven course*.

Very clearly I see this curriculum model as being very intensive on teacher management - something I acknowledge at the beginning of the reflections. I also talk about "letting" lessons or activities flow, again, suggesting that I am positioning myself as traditionally, and nominally in charge of the lesson but wanting the lesson and the content to develop from the students and from the interactions. While I am *guiding* and *letting* I also at times take back control, so to speak, and talk about *recapping* and *touching on* and *explaining* as well as *aiming to stimulate*. The suggestion here is that the role of the teacher remains controlling of the classroom content and processes. Indeed, the fact that the majority of the language emergent throughout the course was captured and funnelled through the teacher onto whiteboards and so on, suggests that there *is* a controlling role for the teacher here, and that I am perhaps, relinquishing less power than I might have suggested or intended at the start. Bremner (2019) reports a similar hybridised approach to learner-centred syllabus, which perhaps begs the question, in line with the comments below from students, whether this is simply inevitable in the context of the classroom? This is something to which we will return in the subsequent chapters.

Barriers

Power and agency, then, are key elements of the research so far, and this was perhaps inevitable. After all, this research began as a criticism of standardised and unchallenged approaches to teaching and learning, enforced by inspection and audit in learning. This standardised approach, and the context in which I was working during the time of the study had an impact on both the content and the method.

Early reflections prior to the start of the course see me discussing how I wanted to make the approach in the research fit into the structure of the documents and processes required by the college. I referred early on to "documents we're *supposed* to use" and "how to adapt" these to the way I wanted to teach. I was critical, perhaps inevitably, of how "[learning is seen as] 'delivering' units and 'covering' the syllabus". "Learning outcomes are seen as a prerequisite" I say, but at the same time suggest how I could perhaps have used these same elements more constructively, for example by adapting documents to fit the mould.

The syllabus was represented most frequently as stemming from qualifications - both ESOL and otherwise. ESOL exams were described often negatively, in particular as having a restrictive and even damaging effect - "lessons [for exams] feel less cohesive, less community and more 'me

first'" and "the group has become more fractured". I also talked about lesson content focussing "explicitly, nakedly" on exam strategy for the reading exam and about giving students "tools for the writing [exam]." As discussed above, as well, the additional qualifications, such as Living and Working In the UK could be seen as having a productive and useful impact on the lesson content - "one discussion from this linked into gardening as a pastime, and the need arose [for the vocab] 'prune' 'cut back' and 'deadhead'."

These barriers to implementing such an approach were much less profound than perhaps I had suggested from the outset. They existed, and they had to be acknowledged, but at the same time I also acknowledged the relative freedom I had as an experienced and trusted member of staff -

> *I am trusted, I think, by my colleagues and by my line managers to make a decent fist of things without having someone checking in on me every half an hour.*

Contrary to my perceptions, a great deal of pedagogical freedom was afforded to me, and indeed had been the case before the research began - the very act of the research itself into curriculum suggests that I had far more freedom of choice and activity when it came to classroom practice than suited my own internal narrative.

A much more frequent "barrier" was, in fact, myself, and my own habits as a teacher. During times of stress or challenge, for example, I acknowledged that lessons can be "quite teacher-led [because this] seemed easier to manage" and how "my own energy has been sapped by [exam focus] so I've done more lessons 'out of the box'."

This links back to my comment above about how much easier it was to do resource-based lessons, rather than responsive ones. The approach could be demanding in the moment, but also in terms of capturing what the students were learning. I acknowledged that the focus needs to be on "what we have learned/talked about/uncovered rather than 'today we will…'" but that this was quite demanding. "I need to come up with a practice task" for example, and even at times acknowledging the lack of control over the capturing of the language and simply that one ended up hoping something sticks - "how to capture language in pair work which is so noisy." There was also the underlying guilt, as well, that I was *not* doing the course that has been passed to me – Graves (2008, p.151) talks about how teachers are seen as doing wrong when they enact the imposed syllabus in their own terms, rather than it being seen as a

problem with the curriculum itself – and this is, perhaps, a variation on that, when I was not so much interpreting the curriculum, but almost entirely rejecting it.

Affective barriers arising from the students also occurred. At times, this was around student expectations - the formal requests outlined above, for example, suggest that students felt that this was something lacking in the lesson. The apparent open-ended nature of the lessons was an issue on a number of occasions, for example:

> *[S14] especially had a BIG affective barrier [to openness of task] and was quite frustrated.*
>
> *The openness of the task didn't work out AT ALL and ended up adapting to a whole class brainstorm but students really struggled.*

I also acknowledged that "students… like to know what is happening".

Sometimes these were more about the tiredness brought on by cognitive load or comprehension of purpose "this [process] requires a lot of latent knowledge"; "the drain the fuel shortage discussion placed on the students" which led to a more subdued and less engaged element to the lesson. Elsewhere, I described how an activity "flowed well but ran out of steam", or how "[subsequent activities] lacked creative *voom* for the class". Perhaps here as well, the issue for the students was that in a two-hour lesson, *they* need some downtime.

Power and Participation

I used the code "participatory pedagogy" for any reflections which identified aspects of practice aligned with Ira Shor (1987)'s definitions of participatory practice, in particular where classroom events were dialogic, democratic, activist and situated in the lives of the learners.

There were two key themes here - one which linked to the notion of power and control in the classroom, and one which situated the classroom practice in the social and political experiences of the students. Classroom power was challenging for the students, at times, and enacting "pure" democracy in the form of negotiation and voting was complex and often divisive. I have described already how students suggested content directly, but at times when I put it to the class whether or not to continue with a discussion, the response was at times negative:

> *[S14] asked q abt difference between I ate / I have eaten - put it to the class as a vote, class voted against. Notion of democracy in class*

> *potentially upsetting the sense of community. [but] the question is relevant and of value, so how to bring it to class now and still respect the community decision?*

There was clearly a sense of here of my own need to enforce my role as the teacher, but at the same time I was wrestling with the need to respect an active community decision. The phrase "upsetting the sense of community" underscored a further tension - the needs of the individual at odds with the (self-evaluated) needs of the rest of the group. This created a kind of triangle of influence, with the individual, the community and the teacher all pulling in different directions.

I acknowledged these tensions in more detail in my own reflections: these were clearly at the heart of my own development across the course, and talk about "relinquishing power" and "an eroding of the teacher's power in the classroom or not wanting to be a gatekeeper of knowledge" but at the same time approaching the course feeling that there is still a culture of respect in an ESOL classroom where a teacher's ideas and opinions are considered of importance. This again echoed the observations of Slembrouck (2000) who also had issues around his own role and the perception his students had of this role.

During a lesson with an extensive political discussion (December 10th) I talked about the voice of "reason" saying "ah but this is you imposing your ideas on the students. You are indoctrinating them into your own left-wing beliefs." This further emphasised my self-awareness at times of the course of my role as the leader and even *owner* of the classroom. I described on one occasion how I shut the conversation down "partly because of [a] potentially racist sentiment, but also because my patience for conspiracy theories is deeply limited these days." One of these was a clearly widely recognised concern over respect and equality, but the other echoing perhaps the concerns of the time, when conspiracy theories were rife over the spread of Covid-19. Again, assuming that such theories were indeed false, my role here as teacher was to ensure the safety and comfort of the students. In one of the lessons described in the second part of this analysis, for example, where students discussed benefit fraud I again limited the discussion because of my own beliefs and understanding of benefit fraud and who commits it.

I also talk about respect for students and their opinions, and about situatedness, and this was a common theme in this part of the data:

> *It doesn't matter whether those opinions are right but whether or not those people feel valued or respected.*

> *I did make a specific effort to [acknowledge and respect the opinions of the students] by inviting the students to comment and by linking the language to the students' own experiences.*

There was again this tension arising between the role of the teacher, the participatory intention of the course and the demands and needs of the students. Whether or not I genuinely relinquished power as such in the classroom is a key issue for the discussion to follow, and one which also arose from the feedback focus groups I held with the students at the end of the course.

Student Focus Groups

The main purpose of the focus group discussions was to gain insight into the student perceptions of the course, but also to gain an understanding of their views on the educational process, and of language and language learning and teaching. I also wanted to explore the barriers that students had to the course in general, and how the mix of students' individual needs linked to the sense of community and learning engendered in the class. A further area developed which linked to some of the issues outlined in the literature review and in chapter 1 - the notion of learner agency and self-awareness.

Student Self-Awareness

One of the key criticisms of Skills for Life Learner Journey that I laid out in chapter 1 was around the skewed notion of learner-centredness, in particular around students' self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. While it remained true that students didn't express their self-evaluation in precise, measurable terms, they did show quite a high awareness of their own aptitude for learning. One recurring theme on this was the importance of error correction:

> *Sometimes I speak to my friend, I say something grammatically wrong, then she goes to me "it's like this" then the next time we remember it.*

and that "It's OK if someone tell you like, more likely you don't [make] this mistake."

This highlighted a student need for *explicit* correction, and a need for the teacher to take the role of the expert, with an emphasis on explaining and describing rules explicitly, a point to which we will return later. That correction and feedback didn't have to be from the teacher; students acknowledged their learning and error correction from sometimes surprising sources: from family members, for example, while S6 described being corrected by English speaking

children to whom she taught Arabic at a local community centre, and S9 described how she learned spelling rules from her role as a classroom assistant in a primary school. “Sometimes children give us the correct and we accept it.”

Peers were seen as unreliable in this sense: “if she make mistake, and I listen to her, I may copy that mistake and other we need somebody to correct.” (S8) and in the case of S4, peers could be distracting and unfocussed: “Lots of students interrupt very often, I think this is hard.” and “If you got some task then we have to talk to each other sometimes, so lots of student don’t do this topic, they’re talking about other things.” It is notable that the focus group in which this theme was a running issue was formed of two students who shared no common language with anyone else in the group, which may have led to the observation that “here, ladies, they not speak English with other people. They speak their language. …Only with me they speak English.” (S9)

Student self-awareness extended to their assessment of their own abilities and their individual differences: “I can’t success my course but slowly slowly I learned” (S8) and “Everyone learn, but somebody slowly, somebody faster.” (S2) while also acknowledging the role of the teacher in managing this process:

> *We have to learn in different ways to give everyone time to understand in his own way or time, and this is what I really like about you.*

This linked as well to a discussion I recorded in my own notes during a lesson on education: where students also demonstrated a self-awareness of their own learning and the barriers to that. In that lesson students identified their own barriers:

> *S2:“We are adults, we are too old, we have to think about too many things.”*
>
> *S18: “After class everything runs away.”*

In the focus groups, they could describe weaknesses in broad terms like “reading” or “grammar” and more often “words” but rarely could they describe this in the specific terms expected by the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. Several students described *noticing*, that is conscious awareness of linguistic rule that they could apply in practice.

Explaining

The concept of “explanation” occurred extremely frequently in the data from the students - students described explanations as important; often in a power imbalanced way with words like “provide us with rules” “give us some example” and of course “explain”. Students were consistently positive about both the concept of being explained to as well as the quality of the explanation “You explained very well” (S2) “When you [i.e. the student] are struggling some question you explain more” (S3) while at the same time being critical of teachers who choose not to explain: “Some teachers… give only paper, no explain the rules. We need rules to know, no, otherwise, what’s the point?” (S14) Students also acknowledged that their role in this was to receive the knowledge: “We have to listen to teacher. “ (S11)

Sometimes the comments could be contradictory, perhaps suggesting that the students recognised the role of the teacher as the holder of the knowledge and the skill, and that it was their own failing for not succeeding: “Still I don’t understand things but you explain things well.” (S4) The language used, however, is consistently one way, although S9 did talk positively about a recent dictogloss lesson, and one in which we reviewed relative clauses inductively (i.e. example first, rules second).

Student Expectations

I wanted as well to pick up on what students expected from a language course - as noted above, explanation and error correction featured highly in this. The teacher was often described in terms which reflect the passing on of knowledge - a clear one-way process, and one which in many ways echoed the “correctness culture” described in Slembrouck (2000). In the student discussions, there was also the sense of how serious a business language learning was for students: “We come to study, we have to study.” This was also reflected in S4’s frustration with students not staying focussed and on topic during activities, and how the teacher should be respected. This power imbalanced teacher role came through in all sorts of interactions with the students - “we have to listen to the teacher” (S2) for example, where students were cast in the role of receivers of the knowledge imparted.

Students were specific as well about expectations, particularly around exam preparation, suggesting that there should be additional homework, additional online classes (which some students had experienced through a maths course which offered an online additional lesson each week.) This expectation also showed an emphasis on the exams and the gaining of qualifications - something the students referred to regularly, but the students’ comments also

demonstrated their own negative experiences, for example S14 saying the exam practice would help so “we are not shocked”, and S4’s negative feelings about the reading exam. (S14’s choice of words here is interesting, but as noted above, it is important not to read too much into this word choice - it could easily have been a connotational error, rather than suggesting that she was more than merely surprised. My own knowledge and experience of this student was that this kind of hyperbole was quite a frequent feature of her language choices, whether intentional or otherwise.)

Negotiation

I was curious as well about the negotiated syllabus (Breen 1984; Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). As noted in earlier chapters, students generally find it challenging to elucidate their own areas for improvement (Schellekens, 2007, Cooke & Simpson, 2008), which presented a barrier to being able to negotiate course content. This led into an explicit question in the focus groups about who should decide what happens in the classroom. In focus group A there was a more balanced view, that teachers and students could decide, but in the smaller focus group B, the feeling was very much that the teacher had the controlling role over content and management of the course. It was noted as well that the teacher had observable levels of influence on self-esteem and confidence, but also that the teacher should modulate this power over the students, so as not to have a negative influence. “If [the] tutor say[s] this is wrong, [then] next time [the student will] never ask.” (S14)

There was a clear, explicit sense that students’ opinions should be respected - “take everybody opinions, then nobody upset” (S6) but at the same time this was acknowledged as a difficult thing to do “Sometimes if you ask a student, they have different opinions. This is hard.” “I prefer working in a team” was mentioned, and “students should have some control though.” The word “some” was an interesting qualifier, because beyond that point, really, the onus for management and control of course content rested with the teacher:

> *“Now [the teacher] get what kind of thing, their level, what they need to learn.” (S4)*
>
> *“the teacher is responsible for the classroom”. (S6)*

One or two students disagreed significantly with the notion of student control over course content. S14 in particular described their feeling as “Sometimes [students should decide], but I think it have to be decided by teachers, not by students”. And when prompted by the question

"who is the most important person in the room?" the students responded with "the teacher". Students clearly placed the teacher as the dominant force in the classroom, and that while student voice and so on was important, the final say was seen to lie with the teacher.

This role of the teacher as a respected leader meant that student trust in the teacher was strong, both personally and professionally.

> *I always say that [you are the most important person in the classroom] not because who is you [i.e. because of who you are] but because any problem I talk with you. When I have something I told you. (S9)*

The positive interactions and trust of the teacher as more than simply an English teacher came through again and again "You are nice to teach our class" and that the role of the lesson and the teacher could sometimes be almost therapeutic with S2's heartbreaking statement that

> *[After Christmas] my mind is very upset because I lost my husband and day by day is understand but my mind is upset but slowly, slowly... Everything is scattered and nice to teach our class and very handsome."*

(That academic year, she had missed four months of class through self-imposed isolation for *iddah* - the traditional mourning period of a widow for her husband. The ESOL class served as a place for her to start to return to her "normal" life.)

Of course, her choice of language - "handsome" - was unusual here, but it does reflect, perhaps, one of the risks of an ESOL teacher discussing their role with the students, particularly in this culture of respect for the role and status of the teacher, where the teacher is elevated beyond criticism, at least to their face. That said, this, coupled with my own respect for the students and their needs, gives us the "mutual respect" described by Schweisfurth (2013) as a component of learner centredness.

Impact of the Course

"Confidence" was the key word here, arising again and again in the students' self-assessment of their progress on the course, for example: "In the beginning I feel still because it's very hard for me, I don't understand a lot of things but finally I feel that I'm very confident." It would be tempting to misread "finally" in this statement but it would appear most likely to mean "at the end" rather than "my last point". Speaking and fluency also came up, sometimes linked with

the notion of confidence as in this statement during a discussion on a *dogme* style lesson: "they have fluent and making confidently speaking as well, no?" (S14) or this: "Have more confidence who speaker" (S8)

Reading exams were raised again as a challenge for the student. We have already described how S8 struggled with reading both before and at the end of the course, particularly in regard to the reading exam. In the student data here was sometimes a sense of resignation that progress in reading as measured by the exam is beyond the skill of the tutor "we should understand [the reading exam] because tutor can't do anything for this," implying a sense of resignation, something which is borne out by other students. S9 summarised the view of several respondents regarding the reading exam, and this linked to my own observations of Level 2 ESOL students generally:

> *I can read everything, but I need to read twice, slowly. I do at home, my son's school things, I read emails, I read letters, But I read and relaxed and do everything, but in the exam different.*

This exam anxiety, and the sense of disconnect between reading practices and reading exams, recurs. With the discussion on student expectations, for example, students expressed concern and anxiety for the exam, in particular the reading exam, but notable in its absence is any mention of the speaking and listening exam (which most of the class had taken either that year or the previous year) or indeed of the writing exam, which again, a number of the students had taken. The obvious reason for this, of course, is that the students had passed those exams, and felt no concerns with their abilities, although this detail in itself bore some witness as to the impact of the course.

It was not all bad with regard to the exams; "You gived us new methods and ways how to answer the [exam] questions and it was very helpful." This was a reference to specific exam based training for the students, an example of explicit teaching, rather than an emergent or participatory process – another example of how the course demonstrated the hybrid learner-centredness of Bremner (2019) where "the very concept of learner-centredness may imply a willingness to do everything possible to achieve learning, even if this means adopting typically teacher-centred methods." (Bremner, 2019, p.62). In response to the external requirements of the institution and the demands of the funded college sector in general, something which was reflected in my own concerns when implementing this kind of approach.

Beyond this, however, students found it hard to make more than general statements about how their language improved - again this is perhaps a reflection of the challenge for language students to do what Frank Coffield refers to as "going meta" (Coffield, 2009, p.27). "It was very helpful this course to improve my English." (S12) and "We move to know from the basic to harder." (S14) While I have outlined caution as regards the language used by students, the terminology was usually simplistic, "basic" "easy" "weak" "OK" "hard" "harder", again, perhaps, an indicator of the challenge for ESOL students to outline their own lack of ability in any detail.

The response to the direct question in group A about whether their English had improved was unanimously (and chorally!) positive, although again, the issue of teacher respect perhaps would imply that the students would not want to show disrespect to a teacher: after all, the lessons were a very personal and inter-social process, so students may not have wished to make me, the interviewer and their teacher, feel bad about the approaches used.

Specific Lessons & course content

As a final point for this analysis, I wanted to know which lessons had stuck with the students. As the course was as much about process as it is about product, I wondered what the students could recall of what had happened on the course. In general, the course content was approved of - whenever asked, students demurred on the question of what they *didn't* like. the comment which perhaps most adroitly sums this up is "that is good; a little bit of everything." (S12)

Time, inevitably, was a factor in this. More recent lessons were more easily recalled than older ones. In the discussion with group B, direct reference was made to a lesson the previous day, for example, on relative clauses. In group A, there was mention of another recent lesson on giving thanks in different ways in English and also sharing one another's languages: "how we can be grateful about our friends, our life and our family.". (S1)

In terms of specific grammatical and lexical items, students mentioned phrasal verbs, relative clauses, "how to use the verbs, present, past, and future and a past participle...their structure." (S12) Functional aspects of language also featured - a memory from an earlier lesson right at the beginning of the course: "I remembered how to ask the help with the polite with the normal, formal and informal like "would you like?"... I like it a lot." (S1)

This was referred to several times in both groups, "how to be polite" with reference to an oddly specific language item: the phrase "if you don't mind." Beyond this, however, students tended

towards general statements, like “you explaining to us rules and some new vocabulary and things like that.” (S14)

Language skills that were mentioned were writing a formal letter, something which came up fairly early in the course in response to a reading text, and again, something I explicitly taught to the students, based on a question arising in a lesson. Speaking in general terms, as mentioned already, was a commonly remembered activity, as was, in group B, a specific mention of dictogloss: “we can improve lots with that. I thought tell you, please, Sam, do it again, it’s very good, actually. If you can do once a week like that it’s very good thing I think.” (S9) This lesson was in April 2022, two months before the interviews, so clearly some aspect of this stayed with the student in question.

Despite my ethical concerns with the additional qualifications that the students did, the response to the content of these was positive - “living and working the UK…was very helpful for us to understand our rights” (S12). This qualification had a significant element of environmental awareness, which was also mentioned in the discussion. There was also a section in the qualification around driving and rules of the road, which as with the rest of this section of the course, I expanded into a series of activities to try to expand the content from simply completing the booklets to something more complete: “We go out of the our city to go vacation. You know, in road, everything around, I remember [it] because he taught to us those things.” (S14)

I have already mentioned exams above, and the value and importance accorded to them by the students. However, while students mentioned reading in the context of exams multiple times, specific reading texts, a key component of the course structure laid out above, were not mentioned at all, and only S9, quoted above, mentioned reading as a practice outside of the exams, and even then this was only to contrast with the exam process.

It is worth noting as well that the two students most concerned with reading exams, S4 & S9, had both sat the Level 2 reading exam at least once before, and struggled to pass the level 1 reading exam.

As a practitioner-researcher, and indeed, relatively early in my development as a researcher, I found myself reflecting on the direction taken by the focus groups and wonder whether the discussion might have been more productive had I taken a more focussed, directed questioning method in order to drill down into specific skills, grammar and memories that the students may have had. For example, had I asked directly “which reading/listening texts do you remember?”

there may have been greater recall of the texts involved in the lesson. However, following a more open selection of questions allowed me to identify what was at the forefront of the students' minds, rather than emphasising my concerns or questions too much. Reading was important, and accorded importance, but did not feature highly in the data. While speaking, especially confidence, lexical items, functional language and grammatical features all feature in the focus group discussions, reading only features in relation to exams, and writing only really in passing reference to formal and informal language.

Reading the Aura: Concluding Comments

The data here reviewed examined the experiences of one class and one teacher over the course of a single academic year, and the writing itself reflected a long journey in my own experiences as a practitioner researcher, beginning with the context, and ending, I hope, with some insight into the students perceptions and emotions as regards the course they had just completed.

The students were a superdiverse group of individuals coming together to operate in a community of practice. The role of the teacher arose frequently, reflecting, perhaps the students' educational backgrounds in contexts which honour the teacher both in society and in their role as the holder of prestige knowledge to be passed on to the learners. University education also featured highly in the students' backgrounds, where professors and other educators were widely seen as gatekeepers of knowledge, the ultimate expression, perhaps, of the expert. This perception of the teacher may have shaped the students' requirements of the teacher to direct the learning.

Returning to the research questions, the course was clearly a process curriculum (Stenhouse, 197; Breen, 1984; Nation & Macalister 2010) in that it started from what would happen on the course, rather than take what is to be learned as the starting point. It "prioritised the route, focussing on the means towards the learning of language and the potential of the classroom." (Breen, 1984, p.52). The content which emerged from this process was as diverse as the students themselves, but more or less entirely led by the teacher. Perhaps "lead" here is the wrong word; or perhaps needs redefining - the teacher led by selection of activity and of text, but also responded to the learners needs as they developed. This wasn't the rejection, perhaps, of the learner journey, but rather the conversion of that over-managed process into a series of activities which compressed diagnostic, formative and summative assessment into short,

responsive sequences of stages. Rather than being reliant on documentation and record keeping to give it value, it gained value from its currency and relevance.

The course which arose valued text and context over grammatical sequencing, but without rejecting grammar entirely. However, what remained with the students was context and confidence. While I had concerns with some of the externally set additional qualifications, these concerns were not shared by the students. Exams influenced content - an inescapable washback, perhaps, but their presence was accepted and even welcomed by the students.

Negotiation of specific language items proved almost impossible, although the work of the lesson on discussing topics provided a basis for the course content, thus basing the content in the real lives of the students. This connects to the criticisms of the target setting process laid out in chapter 1, and students found it hard to engage with explicit negotiation of specific language items. While there is a benefit to the explicit description of language (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022, Lightbown & Spada, 2005) as a skill for students, it is not to be equated with having the tacit knowledge and skills to use the language, and therefore raises questions as to how much time should be spent training students in this.

Sequencing was responsive, in line with the broad pedagogical approach laid out in chapter 2, and drew from student requests, wider world events, local events and, predictably, from the contents of qualifications set and required by the organisation. The sequencing developed with the lessons, however, and if more time was needed on something it was spent, and if not, the lessons moved on, usually under the direction or guidance of the teacher.

The course, then, was a balancing act between student expectation, teacher decision making, ad hoc negotiation and external demands and requirements, but the research questions remain and require answering; the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 6 - Discussion

> I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I need to be.
>
> Douglas Adams, The Long Dark Tea Time of the Soul

Introduction – A Unique Contribution from a Mainstream Setting

We started with a problem, and the problem gave us questions. The first place to begin, then, is to refresh what, exactly, the problem is, and the questions I was asking about that problem. In chapter 5 I presented an overview of the findings, drawing together some of the strands from the conceptual framework and literature review and exploring the themes and issues arising in the data. In this chapter, I plan to discuss these findings in more detail and lay the foundations of an overall approach to curriculum design which can be realistically applied in ESOL while also acknowledging the contextual setting of college based ESOL, with all the challenges that that setting offers.

I argued that the traditional learning journey of assessments and audit that characterise much of ESOL provision in an FE college setting does not accurately represent the experiences which ESOL learners go through. Furthermore, the prioritising of measurability over agency displaces any claim to learner-centredness and that the emphasis on observable product is misleading for both learners and teacher. The focus on creating formal records of such learning for institutional purposes means that the evidence has become more important than the processes through which the evidence is acquired. As we saw in chapter 2, learning a language does not occur in tidy steps which can be neatly unitised into smart targets or tidily evidenceable learning outcomes, and yet the discourse around this process is one which fixates on this observable product. So I suggested an alternative to this production line approach; an emergent, process-based syllabus.

Such an approach is not, in itself, entirely new: indeed, whether any pedagogical approach could genuinely be described as new seems unlikely. However, the context of such an approach is crucial here, and this contextualised nature of the research, with the *necessary* subjectivity of reflexivity discussed in chapter 3, is what distinguishes this research from others.

Other explorations looked at emergent language in limited contexts, for example, as a tangential opportunity (e.g. Norrington-Davies, 2020; Chinn & Norrington-Davies, 2023) or over

a small sequence of lessons (e.g. Gallen, 2014). In other cases, the majority of the work took place in contexts where organisational freedom made it possible to abandon or at least re-purpose the formalised trappings of the product-based curriculum (e.g. Bryers, et al., 2013, 2014; Morgan, 2002; Auerbach, 1992).

This research built on those ideas and placed them in a large FE college, where the Skills for Life 'journey' is deeply entrenched in the discourse around not only ESOL teaching, but also in other subjects, where this deficit, individualist model is widely used. The mainstream system is characterised by formalised tracking and monitoring through Individual Learning Plans, individual SMART targets and the creation of measurable pre-defined learning outcomes, the value of which have been questioned by the ESOL teaching community since very early on (e.g. Sunderland & Wilkins, 2004, Sutter, 2010, 2012). What marks these processes as different from more general advice or guidance is that these systems were not simply advisory but were a required part, for example, of the college's teaching, learning and assessment strategy. A review of the lesson documentation and observation processes supplied by the college at the time is illuminating. In guidance for lesson observation windows, the following item was to be reviewed:

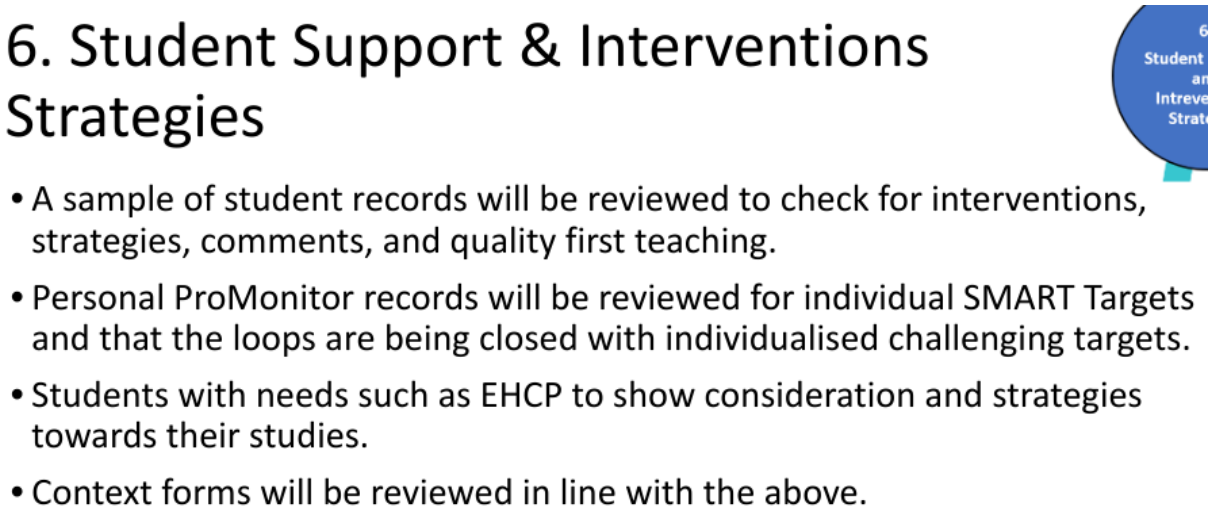


Figure 18 Slide from Kirklees College Guidance on evaluating course performance and lesson observations

This places a clear emphasis on the tracking of individual targets, with reference to "loops being closed" again emphasising product over process.

Another document, entitled "Classroom Expectations" (Appendix 3) required that the teacher should "Display clear learning outcomes and refer to these throughout the lesson". Meanwhile, it was strongly suggested that the students "set an in-class target to identify what they will

aspire to achieve in the session" and that the lesson needed to "have a succinct end … where learning and targets are reviewed." On the same document, the outcomes were required to be "student-centred", with no suggestion as to what this may mean. There is nothing remarkable in these prescriptions, nor indeed terribly new or innovative, even for the time, and links only to the type of approach standardised in the curriculum design models described in question 2. They simply serve to place the research more firmly into its context, where such things are not so much advisory or suggested, but an expectation, as part of an implied set of minimum standards.

And this is the context in which the research took place - where the setting and tracking of achievement against pre-set learning objectives is taken as is, and the discourse is firmly around a teacher-controlled sequencing of lesson types. This not dissimilar to many such contexts in the UK, and yet one in which research into alternatives to this content and outcome driven mainstream is patchy and occasional. The efficacy of an emergent, process-based language curriculum model in this same mainstream context is where the research differs from other work in the area, and the insights into the barriers, as discussed below, are illuminating in this regard.

Research Questions

In order to frame the investigation into the approach, I asked the following questions:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?
- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

The extent and nature of the responses to these questions is the concern of the remainder of this chapter.

RQ1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language, developed through a process curriculum?

This is, perhaps, the most important question, at least in terms of the critique of the outcomes led curriculum which characterises ESOL and educational practices generally. I outlined an

initial outline of the process in Chapter 4, whereby language emerged from multiple interactions - between the students; between the students and the teacher; and between the students, the teacher, and artefacts such as texts, images and graphic prompts. From these interactions the language learning opportunities developed and were exploited by the teacher and by the students to inform the syllabus content of the course. As noted, those were simply informed ideas and while supported by guiding principles and theories, they lacked a cohesive framework on which to develop a curriculum, and crucially, in the spirit of “sparking resonant wide-awakeness" in others (Fine & Torres, 2021) it helps others to understand more clearly how they too could apply this approach in their own explorations.

The Syllabus

The language syllabus which emerged ran counter to my habits as a teacher - my background in EFL inclined me to a grammar-focussed syllabus, whereas in the research, the language which evolved leaned much more heavily towards vocabulary. The vocabulary was consistently rich and interesting - it was often complex and focussed on elements of usage (e.g. collocation, connotation, morphology) much more explicitly than might have been ‘covered’ through lessons where vocabulary is teacher selected. In general, vocabulary instruction is usually limited due to practical classroom constraints - it is impossible, for example, to cover every element of a single word’s meaning and use, nor would it be advisable in terms of cognitive load for students. The crucial difference is that here the limitations on the coverage were based on student *need*. Because the students were of a reasonably high level, and because they were learning English in the UK, where they use and are exposed to English a great deal of the time, the language which emerged was often idiomatic, and usually complex. This has parallels in Gallen (2014, 2015) who also observed the predominance of lexical elements such as collocation over grammatical structure.

The vocabulary that arose was linked to a wide range of themes and topics, and was usually highly contextualised – much like the syllabus described by Winstanley & Cooke (2016, Paper 3, p.8) where language “was always tightly linked to a theme and to students’ own language” (ibid.). One of the key themes that occurred in the year was around employment and careers, something which I recorded myself as feeling sceptical about in the initial reflections at the beginning of the course. Employment and work often feels very much driven by the political needs and will of the time, particularly under a neoliberal government which favours education for employment (e.g. HM Government, n.d.) over all other things. My concerns linked to the wider needs of the students, and yet, when asked at the beginning of the course, the students

highlighted work and careers as a crucial, if not *the* most important focus for the course. That this was underpinned by the students being required to do a "Preparation for Employment" qualification as part of the course is almost irrelevant, although again this was something running counter to my own beliefs about curriculum control. In reality, and this is borne out in reports by the NRDC (Roberts et al, 2004) students saw a great deal of importance in language and skills related to employment and employability (Schellekens, 2011, Roberts, et al. 2004, Baynham et al. 2007).

Grammar is another traditional element of a language syllabus. As we have seen, grammatical structures arose from interactions and from student requests. Although (or perhaps because) vocabulary was much more dominant in the curriculum, specific student requests for language input focused on grammar, and within that, a fairly small range of structures - largely tenses and verb forms. This perhaps reflected the prior learning of the students as much as it did their specific needs. Tenses were easy for students to label as an area for development in language learning; indeed, all of the linguistic areas that students requested were things easily labelled in one or two words, such as tenses, relative clauses, or phrasal verbs. Such forms were also areas which were very likely studied in previous years or classes, and therefore students would have had some awareness of these in some way. These are *all* problematic for students, of course, but again reflect a limited awareness on the part of the students as to what is important and therefore valued in language learning, as well as perhaps reflecting some of the "methodological conservatism" described by Slembrouck (2000) by emphasising the formal grammatical structures as things students are supposed to learn. The focus on these forms was also apparent in student reflections and feedback during the focus groups in which they were highlighted as things that the students learned but also things that they struggled with. Other aspects of grammar are, perhaps, more slippery to categorise, and harder to conceptualise without already having some level of understanding (article use, order of adjectives, conjunctions and non-finite clauses come to mind). Such things developed instead from classroom discussions and interactions, using methods which I will outline below.

One unexpected discovery during the analysis was how my reflections and observations described language in either evolutionary terms, "growing" out of classroom interactions, or in terms of flashes of understanding, where I used words like "spark" and "trigger". These metaphors imply a responsive model, speaking to the serendipity of the classroom so that language itself "sparks" into existence through the interactions in the classroom. This required me to focus in lessons on the various forms being used by the students and an ability to make

classroom-based decisions on *which* to focus on and how far to go with them: Long's (2015) Focus on Form where language input is based on the need identified at the point of interaction. This is also not dissimilar to the descriptions of the process in other descriptions of language in participatory approaches (e.g. Morgan, 1999, Winstanley & Cooke, 2016, Gallen 2014), where Gallen (2014) talks of "surges" of energy, (p.21), while teachers quoted in Winstanley & Cooke (Paper 3, 2016) describe this as "electric". Language in this approach takes on its own exciting existence in the classroom community, a third stakeholder in the lessons, albeit one inextricably connected to the others. This interlinked, interactional approach, where language, students and teacher all come together in the learning space creates an *ecological* approach like that described by Van Lier (2010) with "a network of interdependence" (ibid. p.3)

The other traditional organising principle of a syllabus is around the development of the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Schellekens (2011) argues that without the underpinning grammar and vocabulary, students cannot perform the skills, and while this may be true at an academic remove, the reality of students' lives is that they need to be able to make use of those skills in their lives, and to deny the development of those would be doing them a disservice, so an integrated skills and language approach was necessary. Certainly, the dramatic suggestion in the 2024 Bell Foundation Review of ESOL that literacy teaching (i.e. reading and writing skills) be delayed until after Entry 1 (Schellekens, et al. 2024, p. 9) is unrealistic given the context of learning.

Reading texts were almost all authentic and chosen based on my experience and on the ideas and themes suggested by the students and the classroom interactions. Texts were not pre-planned, but rather responsive to the emerging and changing focuses of the class, or linked to events and social contexts; the currency of a text made for a motivating reading task, promoting engagement in the text and in the theme of the text. What made the texts engaging or motivating is hard to pin down – after all a text can be intrinsically motivating (Dornyei, 2001) yet extrinsically of little value. A more strictly participatory approach might require texts to completely fulfil this extrinsic motivational need, for example focusing on socio-economic, political or practical themes like those discussed by Winstanley & Cooke (2016) or the very practical topics discussed in Auerbach (1992) or Morgan (1998). However, this was not the case in the research. At times, texts simply presented themselves through my own reading, but again, often selected for relevance to the students. For example, the text on multilingualism was something read and enjoyed, and chosen by me to link to one of the universals in the class, serving to help socially bond the class over shared experiences. The cost of living related texts

were found by me based on a conversation in a class, as were the extracts from *Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls*. By having a series of activities that could be quickly applied to any text helped here and is something crucial in making this textual responsiveness possible.

Listening remained problematic, however, with all the listening activities based on either graded texts, produced for learners, or on structured activities, but with short authentic texts. In other similar research, such as Gallen (2014) and Cooke, et al. (2023), as well as considering work by Auerbach (1992) listening is largely an integrated skill, that is, built into the on-to-one interactions in the classroom. Thus students practise listening only as a part of the lesson. Long (2015) and others (e.g. Willis, 1992) on Task Based Language Teaching *do* make space for listening as a *discrete* skill, however, and provides, perhaps, some insight into how it could be further integrated into a responsive ESOL class. However, in this research, listening as a *discrete* skill remained under-practised on the course, and while this had no visible impact on success in the discrete listening assessments at the end of the course, this is a striking imbalance and needs addressing.

Listening skills are crucial in the students' lives beyond the classroom, so we must consider why this may have been so overlooked. Selecting a written text is, for the teacher making the selection judgement, a relatively straightforward task, and for the most part a quick skim through a text is sufficient to make sense of it and to assess its relevance and suitability. With an authentic listening text, the time needed to assess its relevance is the same as the time needed to listen carefully, which perhaps made such texts less attractive from a practical, working perspective. To make valuable use of any language within the text also took more effort and time, unless a transcript was readily available. The other challenge with authentic listening activities was how easy they are to track down. Appropriate, well-constructed short written texts were easy to come by via, for example news or magazine websites. Finding similarly appropriate video and audio was somewhat more challenging, largely due to the time involved in checking and reviewing a spoken text, as well as challenges involving authentic listening for students: decoding spoken language can be more challenging, for instance, due to the immediacy of need in understanding. These challenges of selection, preparation and suitability made listening texts less appealing to me, regardless of the value to students. A written text could be assessed for suitability fairly quickly, and any issues arising handled more easily due to the very personal, one to one relationship each student has with the text, whereas again, the logistics of managing a *spoken* text mean that working with this personal relationship is hard to

achieve. This logistical concern is perhaps a triumph of pragmatism over idealism, and, going forward, is something to consider.

Overall, lessons were diverse in focus and intention. Each lesson, however initiated and discussed, were focussed on a range of language elements - lexical, structural, phonological and skills-based elements occurred within the same lesson and there were no discrete "listening" or "reading" lessons. This could, of course, be attributed to the length of the sessions (2.5 hours, not unusual in ESOL) during which time one would normally expect to cover multiple distinct elements.

It is important to note the prevalence of speaking as the focus of almost half of all lessons, and undoubtedly within all lessons to a greater or less degree, which is reminiscent of Baynham, et al.'s (2007) argument that "talk is work in the ESOL classroom" (Baynham, et al. p.27) Speaking is a cornerstone of language, and it is through speaking, and interaction in particular, where utterances are uniquely generated in the context of that moment, that the "work" of ESOL really happens. Interaction can take on multiple meanings in this context, both the sense of students speaking to one another and the teacher, and of writing for an audience, but also in a more expansive sense, where students interacted with *texts* and with *issues*. Interaction was both linguistic and social, reflecting more realistically how individuals use language to interpret and transmit their reality (Mackey, 1999; Long 2015). Thus the classroom was able to exploit both its community (Van Lier, 1996) and the wider world (Baynham et al. 2007, Cooke & Simpson, 2009) to create affordances which led to learning opportunities like those described by Allwright (2005), and embracing, rather than "imperilling the richness of the language classroom." (ibid.p.14)

Although the sessions, or perhaps *because* the session were so complex, the language developed was wide ranging. As a result, a more structured approach to recording and annotating the emergent language would perhaps have led to greater student consciousness of the language and its applications. This would also serve as a more useful record of what language was uncovered in order to revisit and review the language, or cross reference it verbally, in particular for the students.

Curriculum Negotiation

It would be easy to say that the high levels of teacher control over content and direction fails both the criteria for learner-centredness (Schweisfurth 2013) or for critical empowerment (Shor 1985), but as the Participatory ESOL Project (Cooke, et al., 2023) found, the teacher's role is

crucial in making decisions in order to enable students. Indeed, almost all descriptions of learner-centred, participatory and *dogme* ELT practices (e.g. Norton & Toohey, 2004, Gallen, 2014, Cooke, et al, 2023, Chinn & Norrington Davies, 2023, Auerbach, 1992, even Freire 1970) maintain the role of the teacher as decision maker, and this is no different. There was a degree of negotiation in the topics, of course, but texts and the sequence of themes were largely teacher selected and the corresponding lessons teacher initiated. There are perhaps solid reasons for this, of course: students, as we have seen, struggle to express clearly what they need to know, except where they perhaps were revisiting language they may have already covered. The same issue that I identified both earlier and elsewhere (Shepherd, 2017) with individualised targets is also present in any explicit negotiation of linguistic content, restricted in many ways only to what students already have some awareness of, and not to novel or unique forms. This was clear in the students' comments on their own progress and evaluation - they could speak only in very general terms as to what they could recall and describe, and describe their attitudes to the language, as well as being more easily able to describe events than they could specific language items. New language must come from somewhere, and even Meddings & Thornbury (2009) acknowledge the limitations of relying purely on in-class generated contexts and language. Some external force is needed, some extra element of interaction, in order to enable these novel forms.

This approach raised an observable conflict between student beliefs about learning and teacher beliefs. The values of all teachers, of course, remain beyond the purview of this research, but my own values as regards the role and purpose of learning are close to the notion that learning English, and education generally, is there to provide opportunities for *all* aspects of an individual's life to be valued and prioritised, and therefore to focus on education for employment is narrow-minded and restrictive. This is, perhaps, a result of my own social privilege - as a white, employed, middle-class male I have the social and economic freedom to make judgements on the values of others. For super-diverse ESOL students this may not be the case. For example, a significant number of students on the course were not entitled to fee remission, suggesting that they were on a limited income, either in the form of low-waged employment or some form of government benefit, and many of the students in their motivations for doing the course highlighted a need for employment, or studies leading to employment. In conversations as well social issues arose which implied a less than entirely comfortable financial and social setting. Students' home lives were not always comfortable or stable, both financially and personally; one student, for example, was recently widowed; two were former refugees studying college courses to improve their opportunities; one was a single parent trying

to start a new business, and was relocated to new accommodation in another town mid-way through the year; while another worked as a delivery driver on a zero-hours contract, supporting their family. With such backgrounds, a focus on employment and improving opportunities for themselves and their families seems almost inevitable.

This begged the question, then, to what extent did I, a privileged teacher, have the right to refuse or deny this focus to lessons? None at all, of course. Therefore, any approach for a course based on emergent language, even if linked to critical, emancipatory principles, needs to *start* from the students. Indeed, while I may have had these reservations about the instrumental nature of this motivation, two of the notable texts on critical approaches to ESOL, Shor (1987) and Auerbach & Wallerstein (2004) both explicitly reference employment, jobs and work in their title and impetus – even Freire (1970) wrote from an assumption that working for a living and meaningful employment is a primary consideration for learners. That said, however, while the role of the teacher shifted in the course, there was still an expectation that the teacher *lead* the learning in some way.

RQ3: What tools and techniques enable language production and development, and learner engagement?

At the beginning of the year, I defined a loose process based on the principles of participatory ESOL (Bryers, 2014, Auerbach, 1992) and *dogme* ELT – largely drawn from Meddings & Thornbury 2009, which was then applied throughout the course, and, following reflective practice principles, refined and focussed across the course, bringing together the wider reading and learning along with the experiences of applying the approach.

The overall intention of the course design was to create the conditions in which learning can arise: creating *affordances* in line with the conceptualisation laid out by Allwright (2005) and Anderson (2015. These are events which gave rise on learning opportunities: often planned and developed, rather than being dependent on fortuitous classroom conversation. While classroom conversation also had a role: as Thornbury & Slade (2006) identify, and as I found in several lessons, learning could and did come from conversation, but on its own it was not a reliable source for learning opportunities.

The initial course planning stages were relatively open, and consciously so in order to keep things open to the range of possibilities of a course based around emergent language: unprincipled principles, perhaps. These open-ended ideas allowed for the

planning/acting/evaluating cycle to progress, however. This process also ran alongside the process of the "desk-based" research - exploring practical ideas (e.g. Morgan, 1998, Cardiff, et al. 2007, Campbell & Kryszewska, 1992, Deller, 1990, Meddings & Thornbury, 2009) and theoretical and philosophical underpinnings (e.g. Bryers, et al. 2014, and later Cooke et al 2023). Writing these up into the literature review, itself a part of the planning stage, went on to inform and systematise the theory behind classroom practice.

As the course progressed, and through reflection and research, I identified three key principles: interaction (between students, teachers, texts and the social context of the learning and learners); participation (where students asked questions which challenged and analysed those interactions); and emergence, where language is not pre-set but rather emerges through an interplay of interactions in the classroom. We recognised that the classroom was also a vivid context for language use and experience, (Van Lier, 1996) which fostered its own sense of community and belonging. Although based on elements of *dogme* ELT (Thornbury, 1999) and on participatory ESOL (Auerbach, 1992, Bryers, 2013), the model fitted into neither category neatly. It is not "pure" unplugged/*dogme* ELT because the language is based not only on what students bring to the lessons: after all, all the texts which were used as a springboard for activities were teacher selected, and there was some use of formalised materials. There was also the influence of exams and other organisational requirements which at times made it challenging for the content to be as purely student-based as one might expect in a *dogme* classroom.

For these reasons, and more, to describe the approach as purely *participatory* would also be a challenge. Cooke, et al. (2023) discuss the notion of hybridised participatory ESOL and warn of "a risk of splits developing along the lines of 'strong vs weak', 'pure vs adulterated', 'radical vs liberal', '*doctrinaire* vs *vendu*'" (ibid. p.28). However, this does appear to fit along such a continuum, heavily influenced in this case by the emphasis on audit, and the constraints of a big FE college. There was *some* sense of social justice in the topics and themes selected, and there was *some* flattening of the power balance of the classroom by allowing student voices to inform content and method. However, many lessons focussed on what might be seen as more frivolous topics: a light article on "facts about English,", for example, or a recipe for a Christmas Cake. The work on the Life in the UK qualification, while including some more 'serious' work, also included less socially urgent, less "serious" (Shor, 1987) work on art and culture, while other lessons were based simply on what I felt would be appropriate for that day.

The course that evolved from this bore similarities to both Meddings & Thornbury's (2009) sequence of "R"s, and drew elements from these, for example reformulating and recasting.

There were also clear similarities to the descriptions of practice in Bryers et al. (2014) and Gallen (2014) such as the shape of some of the tasks, and the influence of Cardiff et al. (2007). More practically, there were simple activities drawn from practical "recipe" books (such as Campbell & Kryszewska, 1992, Rivers, 1988 or Deller, 1990) which supplied ideas for activities dependent not on outcomes but created affordances which led to learning opportunities (Allwright 2005).

Perhaps the best label to place on the curriculum model that evolved is not critical or participatory, but rather *responsive* - the curriculum developed in response to the changing circumstances of the learning and the learners. "Circumstances" here encompass both the emergent needs of the students on the course and the emerging world within and around the classroom, and an awareness of and *interest in* these circumstances is critical. Lessons included responses to student need and discussion, of course, but also in response to organisational demands, and to the wider social contexts of the students. Thus, discussions of the rising cost of living sat alongside reading stories to children and building newspaper towers. Like human life in microcosm, there was space for sober contemplation and analysis of complex social issues, and there was space for cake recipes. Making *space* is key here: the classroom became a safe space for the students to participate in their multiple social roles, whether as parents, carers, spouses, citizens, employees, or as individuals defined less by their interactions with others and instead by their own personalities and experiences. This is Van Lier's (1996) notion of the classroom community being its own space, within which students, and indeed teachers, can exist without the expectations and demands forced upon them by the outside world.

This was, however, a *language* course. The primary reason for every person in that room was to develop the English language abilities of the students. The course *content* which developed was wide and varied, but through being topic and discussion focussed placed a much larger emphasis on lexis and lexicalised grammar, for example collocation and phrasal verbs, sometimes referred to as language "chunks" (Schmidt, 2000). That is not to say that there was no space for structural analysis; far from it, and one of the key areas for student contributions and negotiations was on traditional grammar structures. However, overall, the approach made much more space for meaning, and how that meaning could be negotiated and communicated. What was crucial, however, is that this language was not pre-defined, which meant that a slightly different organising principle was needed.

The norm in course planning in language is to begin with outcomes or intentions. Training courses assume this, and as we saw in chapter 2, most writers and guidance on curriculum design emphasise this model (e.g. Nunan, 1988, Nation & Mcalister, 2010, Petty, 2009) on course planning places the emphasis on *what* will be achieved rather than on *how*. In this case, however, the course began not with intentions or outcomes, but rather with decisions about *actions* - a curriculum based on events and activities rather than outcomes. In terms of squaring the audit circle, this shift from outcome to event was perhaps the biggest departure from standard practice - college documents leave increasingly small spaces for activities and instead place emphasis on outcomes and assessments.

The emphasis on measurable learning outcomes, as I have discussed before, is an inaccurate model, which creates a false impression of learning at the expense of progress. Measuring the pig, in this case at least, does not fatten it. Being measurable may benefit a knowledge-focused curriculum (and even then there are surely questions about the validity of the outcome as the planning focus), but here, where the theory/practice distinction is blurred throughout, such measurability constructs simply act as vapid window dressing for the real learning which has occurred elsewhere.

Instead of “outcomes”, the curriculum process placed meaning making at the forefront. Most student interactions on the course developed from a need to understand and to be understood, which placed meaning at the forefront. This took many forms - responding to text, responding to others, responding to local, national and international contexts - and led to a curriculum which *uncovered* language rather than covered it (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Thus, then, the course “content” was uncovered *retrospectively*, at least in terms of the systemic components of a language course - grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, while the other traditional elements of a language curriculum - the “skills” of reading, writing, speaking and listening - were, to an extent plannable, but always with an open mind as to what the students gained from the activities. The reality of language *use* is that the “skills” and the “systems” of language are always integrated. We require grammar, vocabulary, phonology, punctuation and so on in order to interpret and create meaning through spoken and written language, and the course reflected this.

This is not to say that discrete language lessons did not occur. Sometimes, for example, emergent language was too complex to explain or discuss briefly. A lesson on conditionals, for example, developed following late lesson contributions by students, at which point there was no time to sufficiently explain it, so the language was ‘parked’ ready for the next day. That it also

allowed me to refresh my memory on some aspects of the grammar was merely an added bonus.

It would be tempting to see an approach like this as “making it up as you go along”, but in fact the lesson planning process required as much thought and planning as an outcomes-led course. Indeed, one of the reflections of my own throughout the course was that in fact teaching a traditional lesson based on choosing outcomes and selecting resources tended to take less thought and planning because I simply let the materials do the heavy lifting. In this approach I had to think about the processes carefully - were the activities sufficiently open or engaging for the students? Were the prompts generative enough?

Activities which proved engaging were, predictably, often those which captured the students' interests. The initial “themes” activity outlined above proved useful in identifying this at the beginning of the course and informed the activities which followed. It was important here to suspend my own prejudices and beliefs - the students identified work as a key theme that they wanted to explore, even though my own beliefs about the role of education resist the narrow ‘employment and employability’ agenda being promoted by current and previous governments, and which shows no sign of changing.

The lessons which led from events and activities required much more energy and focus on the part of the teacher - monitoring interactions, actively listening to identify opportunities for emergent language, making space for students, arbitrating in disagreements and ensuring a balance of roles in the interactions, so that no student was left hanging or excluded from conversations. It was highly intensive and challenging to be ‘always on’ during lessons, and at times it was simply necessary to let interactions occur *without* monitoring for opportunities. Reading tasks also offered a respite from the focus.

The effort needed by the teacher in both planning and in executing the lessons was, perhaps, one of the challenges of using such an approach. The freedoms and flexibilities afforded by it were, however, more than enough to compensate, and the successful, engaging, more flowing lessons, where interactions led to interactions, texts to discussions, and the huge wealth of language engendered by the classroom far outweighed the challenges of planning them. If anything, the sudden rise of a flurry of language could be, if anything, more energising.

RQ2: What barriers occurred?

The concept of a barrier here is not something which prevented or limited learning in some way, but rather something which obstructed the process curriculum. As noted in the previous chapter, there was a mismatch between the expected barriers and the actual barriers to implementing this emergent curriculum, and these can be classified according to whether they stem from the organisation and its demands, the students and their experiences, or from the teacher. The ESOL curriculum, as noted in chapters 1 and 2, is a product of a hierarchy of policy and stakeholders (Graves, 2008) where the initial plan is interpreted by various organisations and individuals (the Department for Education, the Education & Skills Funding Agency, Ofsted, college senior leaders, middle managers, and, eventually teachers and learners as enactors of the curriculum) each arguing that their own priorities and values are the most important, although all, of course, claiming that they are "learner centred." (e.g. DfES 2003, Ofsted, 2021).

In this case, the organisation, a large general FE college, required a range of performance management processes to ensure what would normally be referred to as "quality." These included, but were not limited to, the following systems:

- Individual learning plans
- SMART targets for learners
- Tracked diagnostic assessment results
- Scheme of work
- Additional (non-ESOL) qualifications
- ESOL exams

In theory, at least, several of these were easily incorporated into an emergent syllabus - the scheme of work, for instance, was completed retrospectively in terms of "outcomes". As such this proved to be a useful tool when reflecting on the process and the effectiveness thereof, but the question remained as to whether the act of recording in this format would hold value for all stakeholders, or only for the teacher. In the year of the research study, for example, audits were carried out but only by the quality assurance team, without subject specialist knowledge. The emphasis therefore was on the *presence* of such documentation, and much less about the *substance* of what was recorded on it. Ironically enough, the compliance issues highlighted in chapter 1 were in fact far less of an issue, precisely because of the size and complexity of the organisation in which they occurred. In the second part of the year, during the main stage of the research, the college brought in external consultants ahead of a potential Ofsted inspection,

but again, these were non-specialists whose focus was purely on the *existence* of such documentation, not the quality of it.

The student focussed documentation was a more challenging affair, but again, this particular circle was squared through some careful phrasing. Diagnostic assessments, supplied by the college and developed by the ESOL team, were done, their results recorded, and the marked documents were returned to the students, although treated as simple reading and writing tasks, rather than assessments upon which to base a course. They were, however, present. Individual Learning Plans were recorded using a computer database system (ProMonitor) and students were expected to own the targets by entering them themselves. Unfortunately, due to the issues raised in chapter 1 around students' abilities to express their learning as specific targets meant that in practice the targets were entered by myself. In order to meet compliance demands, then, the students all had carefully composed targets which could, in fact, be taken to refer to several events within the course: "listen to a recording and identify details" "read a text and identify gist" "Write a paragraph on a theme or topic to be decided." In this case the competencies (Richards & Rogers, 2001) could be seen to be active in informing the course content, but without restricting or pre-defining it in any way. Other strategies were more dishonest: a little effort with a previous scheme of work created a document which looked sufficiently right that could be presented to an auditor or observer. That said, however, this represented very little by way of change in practice for myself, as, like many teachers, I regularly re-used old schemes of work, simply updating them according to need. Indeed, as recorded in Day (2023) and in Baynham et al. (2007), the practises and values accorded to such documents varies from teacher to teacher, and the only consistency is the inconsistency with which they are used.

In reality, then, the expected barrier of internal audit was much less of a concern than had been suggested in chapter 1. This was achieved (and arguably could *only* be achieved) through the "artful pragmatism" (Gleeson & Shain, 1999, p. 482) of strategic compliance - "partially conform[ing] to managerialism in order to create space for manoeuvre and hence defend what they value in their educational practice." (Orr, 2011. p.9). Shain and Gleeson (1999) found that this is much easier for experienced teachers - and indeed this was the case here: I was, at the time, considered a reasonably senior member of the teaching team, having been in post for some 13 years, and the career trajectory which included ESOL teacher, teacher trainer, and advanced practitioner. I therefore enjoyed a significant amount of freedom. It is worth wondering, however, whether such freedoms would be accorded to a novice teacher, or one

doing a training course whose planning demands are product rather than process based (e.g. Cambridge English, 2022).

The other organisational issues are related to qualifications - both ESOL and non-ESOL. As noted in chapter 5, as well as taking ESOL qualifications, the students also completed portfolio-based qualifications in Preparation for Employment and in Living and Working in the UK. My own misgivings about these elements of the qualification were based, largely, in their relevance and in the motivation behind the college introducing these qualifications. The qualifications were intended primarily to boost the funding for ESOL provision - a welcome additional number of hours and a financial boost for the college, but these hardly seemed positive reasons in terms of the students. This historical resistance on my part showed in the comments, but in fact, as noted in the student feedback, the students themselves enjoyed the focus on those topics. It should be noted, however, that the portfolios were used as a jumping off point for more extensive language-learning work, but nevertheless, my notion that the students wouldn't see their relevance was clearly misjudged. It is a question to ask, however, that if I had tackled the additional qualifications as they had been designed, through completing tasks prompted by fixed PowerPoint presentations, would the students have been so welcoming? It would be nice to say not, but in reality it is impossible to call. Certainly, the tweaking of the content and the additional work added, with the discussions, the attendant reading texts and so on, would have made them more engaging and challenging for students at that level.

The final perceived barrier from an organisational perspective was that of the ESOL exams. Over time, students have indeed come to value these exams, and to actively want to achieve well in them. They featured highly in the student discussions and explicit focus on them formed part of some of the later sessions. Washback (Taylor, 2005; Prodromou, 1995) is evident in the course records. In terms of the approach being investigated, reliant on living, emergent language and concepts, this would clearly seem to be negative - in that it "constrains the teaching/learning context." (Taylor, 1995. P. 154). Towards the end of the course, for example, some reading tasks used authentic texts with pedagogical activities attached which directly referenced exam tasks and which were designed for exam practice. This took the form of the question format by being multiple choice and laid out to look like the exams. Cloze-test and gap fill activities were also used, applying similar criteria for deleting items as used in the exams. As well as being procedural, however, there was a need to focus on content such as text type and purpose, as well as indicative features of text which, as I highlighted in chapter 1, are of only limited, or restricted value for ESOL learners, but which arise purely as a link to adult literacy standards.

Whether this point would have arisen or emerged naturally is hard to say, not least because of their importance at lower levels. A concern with this on the part of the students may have been a *wash-forward* from previous exams where students not only lose marks but could potentially fail the entire exam for not getting these "whole text" elements right. On this particular course, very few students were taking formal writing exams, but these exams have a spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) test as part of the exam which consist of entirely fake tasks you would be unlikely to encounter or *need* in real world language use, and which, therefore, needed specific input and training on how to tackle. One question, for example, required students to re-order words to form statements and questions, while another asks students to complete sentences based on simple prompts which clearly indicate specific grammatical structures (e.g. "Having been there before…." "If I had known…."). In addition, the mark scheme for these questions (City & Guilds, n.d.) awards only one mark for each sentence, so despite getting the grammar implied by the prompt right, a mistake with an unrelated grammar form could lead to that mark being lost. Factors such as these, then meant that specific, teacher-driven activities were required to ensure that students were able to tackle these.

Not all the exam focussed work was negative in impact, representing unrealistic uses of language and language skills. Some of the productive tasks included skills and elements which are more generally useful for students beyond the course and the exams. There was, for example, a focus on presentations for the speaking exam, and work on the importance of questions and questions forms for the discussion part of the speaking exam. Written exam practice also allowed for real life type activities, such as writing emails and letters, which students might conceivably do, or writing articles or blogs - less likely, perhaps, but like presentations in the speaking exam, forming a useful resource for me as a teacher to evaluate student language. Where the exam-based activities were open enough, they were easily incorporated into the course as a means of assessing emergent language, or as a task to give focus to an emergent theme or discussion. An obvious and more participatory use of writing might be in the form of writing emails to those in power - something which did happen on this course, on the topic of the standard of food and service in the college canteen. While this is not what we might imagine to be a part of a participatory ESOL programme, with an externally social or political focus, it was based on students expressing and problematising a concern, examining it and taking action.

The presence of an exam practice paper as a text was perhaps inevitable, as was the presence of work on presentations and presentation skills: a very "academic" task with (arguably) only

limited real-world value. Their assessment value was high, however, as they represented an extended turn with which to assess students' language. Exam tasks, in fact, could be seen as the only truly "authentic" activities; activities and texts which are being used for the purpose for which they were intended. Exams, as we have seen in chapter 5, are also needed and respected by the students, so when negotiating the curriculum, and what students *want* it is necessary to consider this. It is something of a chicken-and-egg conundrum: do students want the exam content because they value and want the exams, or do they value and want the exams because of the emphasis that we place on them? Language exams and their content are exercises in power - "social and political instruments that have a strong impact on education and can determine social order" (Shohamy, 2006. p.93).

There existed a discord between my ideological concerns, and the needs and focus of the students, which would appear to be more pragmatic. As with the additional qualifications, I expressed concerns and reservations about the exams, and in both cases this was due to the reasons for their imposition - increasing funding, rather than improving the student experience. Such a motivation is, for an idealistic teacher, a matter of some conflict. The evidence from the student focus groups was that the students value the exams, despite the lack of parity, as would be evidenced not only by the frequent mentioning of the exams, but also the stress and anxiety accorded to them. While students appreciated the directed strategies for tackling exam tasks, in particular the reading exam, it is interesting to note how students tended to take responsibility for failing exams, rather than laying that responsibility on the teacher: as S8 said, "the teacher can't do anything for this." Why this should be the case, and so explicitly in relation to the reading exam was curious. Perhaps the students' respect for the teacher - casting the teacher as a hardworking, dedicated individual - meant that their instinct was to absolve the teacher from responsibility.

That students took responsibility for their lack of success in the exams remains an interesting point, however. When considered in line for the general respect and positivity accorded to the teacher, this could be seen to suggest that the students don't want to blame the teacher; faith in the teacher's skills and knowledge suggested that the students absolved the teacher of that responsibility. You did what you could, they seemed to be saying, but we let you down.

This final point brings us from the organisation to the second of the major stakeholders in an ESOL class: the teacher. In Chapter 2 I outlined elements based on Ira Shor's 1987 article "Working hands & Critical Minds: A Freirean model for job training." which act as loose criteria for a critical or participatory approach to the classroom. For Shor, and others (e.g. Cooke, at al,

2023; Cogo et al., 2023; Morgan, 1992) the role of a participatory, critical classroom is one in which the students are positioned not as merely central to the learning but as active agents in transforming their own power imbalances. This requires, in the same breath, that the *teacher* re-address their role in the classroom, and become more of an equal position to that of the students. This push towards the parity of power and influence links with the dialogic and enabling nature of learner-centredness highlighted by e.g. Bremner (2019) and Schweisfurth (2015) and suggests that it is desirable for the teacher and the students work in an equitable and democratic balance, collaborating harmoniously to achieve the shared goal. In effect, what is trying to be achieved here is the notion of a community of practice but as Wenger (2000) observed, this is not something which is achieved through forcing a community of practice, but rather one which evolves naturally through people working together to achieve the shared aim. Motivations and intentions in the language classroom were more complex than even this - as well as a shared intention (of learning English) there was also a selfish element ("I need English for me…") which unbalanced that sense of community sense at times. Thus there was an imbalance between the requests of individuals and the whole group, for example when negotiating a focus for a lesson.

My role as teacher changed, but not completely. As we have seen, I took the main lead in deciding the sequence of lessons, the texts to be read and, albeit in negotiation, the sequence of themes and topics to be covered. This was, it would appear, unavoidable. Cooke et al (2023) report on how the teacher decides the sequence of activities, Morgan (1992) describes lessons which he planned, Meddings & Thornbury (2009) suggest a structure and strategies, not to mention "recipes" for lessons, and Auerbach and Freire describe how they made decisions on behalf of the students, choosing texts and codes for discussion and review. Everything in the classroom remains if not entirely dictated by the teacher, then at least filtered through or curated by the teacher, and this has remained the case.

What changed, ultimately, was the expectation. The expectation that the *product* would arise after the fact, that there was space for negotiation and change if and when the students needed it. But more often than not, in this research the decision-making process remained with the teacher, much as it did with the courses described by Bryers et al, (2015), Winstanley & Cooke (2016), Auerbach (1992) and Morgan (1998) as well as in the descriptions of emergent language activities in Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) and Meddings and Thornbury (2009). The language chosen for emphasis in the recalibration type activities such as recasting or reframing language is also based primarily on teacher decision-making, not on whether the language in

question is of relevance or interest to the students, again, reflecting the findings and descriptions of others (ibid.). It is assumed that it will be, however, because the students have a need here to communicate, and the teacher helps to satisfy that need through co-construction of meaning.

The obvious response to this is to say, "so what?" And indeed, a question has to be asked whether the process would be as effective if the students were given free rein to do as they pleased, or whether they *could*. We have already observed that it is a challenge for students to make sense of what they don't know, both formally through target negotiation, and more informally. What they can do, however, is attempt to communicate and in the end have that communicative gap appropriately and usefully filled.

My reflections on the course continually positioned me as the controller of the lessons, although the language is that of team management rather than that of leadership - third person plural was repeated throughout the reflections, suggesting that I clearly wanted to position myself as an equal. The power of the teacher can perhaps never be removed, at least not fully, but I was clearly aiming to reposition my teacher-self to make the course more of a shared enterprise than a military mission.

RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches? Do the students feel that they have agency in the development of the curriculum?

This theme of power and parity links nicely to the final research question - how students perceived the course, and what they thought of it. Did they highlight "power imbalances" as a key issue, or was there something else at play This is perhaps the final issue to be considered here, and one which acts as the most challenging in many regards.

Central to my criticism of the learning journey outlined in chapter 1 was the challenging notion of student self-awareness - making use of metacognitive strategies to enhance learning, Coffield's "going meta" (2009, p. 27) Individual learning plans and target setting are particularly problematic, as noted by Schellekens (in Roberts et al., 2004) and Mallows (2006), where students struggled to put form and shape on their individual areas for development. However, did the research highlight any improvement or alternative? There was some focus on open negotiation at the beginning, which gave the students some sense of their own control over the topics and throughout the students had very clear ideas about when, how and *why* they used

English. However, the full negotiation of content as suggested in some versions of Breen & Littlejohn's (2000) otherwise open ended approach was simply unworkable here, and arguably would always be unworkable as it required that the students be able to identify clearly what they currently do not know.

Instead, it could be argued that the responsiveness of the course model meant that students were *constantly* addressing how and when they use language. Students were certainly aware of their own barriers to learning, and what they needed to do to manage them, although this was focussed on practical issues, like work or family commitments, or on personal and interpersonal concerns, such as confidence.

This confidence was one of the key features in the discussion of the impact of the course - and something which developed as a result of the course. The high frequency of interactive work in the course, during which the students were forced in discussions and interactions to draw on their own resources, required that the students be more active in the negotiation of meanings in lessons – the meaning-focussed communication described by, for example, Long (2015) in an analytic syllabus, and Breen's "unity of text, interpersonal behaviour and ideation" (Breen, 1984, p.161). This linguistic self-reliance meant that in order to make meaning, the students had to draw on language (learned and in the process of learning) and had to think for and by themselves. Space for comfortable passivity was not always available, but at the same time they had the support of their peers and their teacher. Students did report discomfort and frustration at times, highlighting a need for clear explanations as to *why* things were happening as they were. This in turn links to the question raised above about the role and power of the teacher - here, I had to be explicit in the rationale behind the tasks set in class.

This clarity of approach was crucial. It is tempting as a teacher to want to hold yourself at a remove from the students; a return to the notion of the teacher as the banker in Freire's (1970) criticism of traditional education, imparting knowledge and wisdom to the students, who wait passively for your insight. While sometimes a pedagogical approach may suffer from too much explanation in this case, it was essential to explain my rationale in order to calm students' concerns about what was happening.

This worked because students had respect for the teacher. Again and again, students in the research spoke positively about me and the lessons. They clearly expected knowledge and leadership from their teacher, and overall they were content for the teacher to have control of the events on the course; indeed, the students *expected* this as part of the course process.

Students spoke frequently about *explaining* and *correcting mistakes*, emphasising this role for the teacher repeatedly in the data, and expecting that this happen in the classroom. There was plenty of scope for this, for example in recasting and recording student language, through the negotiation of meaning already discussed. This student need for teacher control further cements the ideas laid out above - that the "pure" model of learner-centred teaching is a mythological and unrealistic construct, and that all formal teaching and learning contexts are inevitably power-imbalanced. As much as I might want to relinquish this power, the students are not necessarily keen to take it on – not unlike Slembrouck's (2000) "methodologically conservative" students who simultaneously expect and also dread the control of the teacher.

In terms of specifics, the sense of what students *gained* from the course was actually much harder for the students to pin down. They all felt that they *had* learned, but when pressed on the specifics were much more limited to very familiar areas of challenge for students - phrasal verbs, relative clauses, and "tenses" were all raised. What students know and don't know about the language is complicated to assess (as we have seen) and the connection between explicit knowledge about language and its tacit application is notoriously difficult (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 2005, Long, 2015, Ellis, 2016, Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022) , and it is hard to say whether these lessons stuck due to genuine student awareness of personal language or whether these simply fed into well-known areas of concern for English language learners, and which they had studied before. There were interesting parallels here to the language items which were specifically requested during the course - as mentioned above, the focus on tenses in any requests for grammatical structures, or on vocabulary items. There was clearly a tendency for students to value things they know they don't know - *known unknowns* so to speak - rather than to be able to state specific concerns with language they don't know.

Again, this inability to elucidate the genuinely unknown, much like the ability for students to "own" the targets of their learning (Schellekens, 2004, Cooke & Simpson, 2008) meant that the students struggled also to *reflect on* that language after the face. Even leaving aside the value (or otherwise) of metalinguistic knowledge, except as a learning tool for higher level learners (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022), the fact that it here, as elsewhere, almost impossible for students to be able to reflect sufficiently on that in order for formalised target setting to have any value, whether individual or collective, such as in the form of lesson learning outcomes.

Students found it similarly hard to focus on specific lessons, although some striking examples came through, for example the *dictogloss* lesson and a lesson on intercultural methods of giving thanks. That latter was one which had clearly stayed with the students for some time.

What is clear from this, however, is that the course lacked an effective means for the *students* to capture and record emergent language. My own records were extensive, and whiteboard screenshots shared with the class via the group's Teams page for almost every lesson taught across the year. Whether students were accessing this is not known, and remains a question of some debate, and represents a gap in the pedagogy well worth exploring, and this would be the next stage of the research to be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 - Conclusions & Recommendations

> In the rainforests there are these very tall trees and right in the top branches of the trees there are these like great big flowers called . . . bromeliads, I think, and water gets into the flowers and makes little pools and there's a type of frog that lays eggs in the pools and tadpoles hatch and grow into new frogs and these little frogs live their whole lives in the flowers right at the top of the trees and don't even know about the ground, and once you know the world is full of things like that, your life is never the same.
>
> Terry Pratchett, Wings.

Introduction

We have identified a problem, investigated the background to that problem, and, in chapter 2, explored some possible solutions to that problem. With the evidence in place from chapter 5, I laid out some foundational principles in chapter 6. In this chapter, then, I aim to lay out a workable and manageable alternative to the traditional goals > targets > outcomes > activity > assessment model of the Learning Journey (DfES, 2001).

This is, perhaps, a bold claim. After all, in educational research, context is everything. What "evidence" suggests is effective practice in a high school maths classroom in California may not necessarily work in an ESOL class in community centre in Yorkshire, while something developed for students in small Kenyan villages may be perfect. And what worked in my classroom, with that group of students, and with those specific conditions may or may not work elsewhere, whatever the apparent similarities might be. This is both the blessing and the curse of practitioner-based research, of course - there is a desire to enact change in one's own practice but at the same time there must be an expression of the limitations of that practice and the contexts in which it occurred. This research was also *critical* research - research which was established in response to a power-imbalance of the teaching and learning context – both my own established practices and the accepted norms of my context - the organisation, the location, and the politics.

In order to draw more meaningful conclusions, then, let us first revisit briefly the context and the actions within that context, because these things have an impact not only on the research itself but also on its value beyond the boundaries of that context. Reaffirming these contextual

factors is useful here in order that while the intention of the research was not to develop absolute universals in ESOL practice, but rather to supply a model which others might use, develop and respond to.

- The research focused on a part time ESOL course, that is, one which develops the English language needs of migrants living and working in the UK.
- The students were at Level 1 or Level 2 on the current ESOL curriculum, approximately B2/C1 on the CEFR.
- The ESOL curriculum is dictated by a curriculum process and syllabus document devised at the turn of the century, and which has not been reviewed or updated since.
- Many of the systems introduced at that time were, or have become, focused on the reification of learning rather than the learning itself.
- The emphasis on creating learning artefacts (diagnostic assessments, individual learning plans and targets, evidence of achieving those targets, exams, schemes of work and so on) require a top down, teacher dictated approach, rather than achieving the stated aims in curriculum documents (e.g. DfES, 2003) as being learner-centred
- The research took place in a large FE college. This placed certain requirements, such as exams and audit conditions which had to be met throughout the research.

Within this context, I explored a responsive approach to the curriculum, based at first on general principles drawn from a range of methods such as Teaching Unplugged (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009), the Reflect Approach to ESOL (Cardiff, et al., 2007) and participatory ESOL (Cooke, et al., 2023; Auerbach, 1992). I adapted and merged these methods in line with my own beliefs and to meet the needs of the students. I chose not to be prescriptive or purist in following any one approach, however, like the *bricoleur* teachers described in the ESOL Effective Practice Project (Baynham, et al., 2007) "hunting out and adapting new materials and making what they can out of what is to hand in classrooms saturated with talk" (Baynham et al. 2007, p. 54) or Kumaravadivalu's (1994) notion of *principled pragmatism* - "how classroom learning can be shaped and managed by teachers as a result of informed teaching and critical appraisal" (ibid., p.31).

The method, and methodology was a critical case study (Bassey, 1999; Yin 2018) focussing on a single group and a single teacher: a singular enacted curriculum, so to speak. It also had a critical intent - the act of carrying out the research asked questions of the status quo, challenging the implicit power held by systems and processes expected in the context. It was also *practitioner* research in which I had a joint role as both researcher and teacher. I had a

concern that there was an ethical concern with enacting a departure from the norm on the students. In the event, this was unfounded, for several reasons. The first is that the course may have been a formal exploration of the processes, many of the changes were not radically different to what had been done before. I have always, for instance, chosen themes and topics from student interests, on issues and events arising in the outside world, or on conversations. In many ways, therefore, what this research explored was a more systematic approach to this in an attempt to reach some form of solid framework for both my practice and the practice of others. One could argue that *any* form of reflective, exploratory practice is ethically unsound, and should be forbidden, but this then places teachers into a role of mere technicians, delivering pre-sequenced, standardised lessons. Teachers are also human, and the act of teaching a human interaction, and introspection and self-evaluation is surely inevitable, with change almost certain as a result.

During the research, several lesson activities and ideas were trialled and explored, reflected and altered on a weekly, daily, or even within an individual lesson where conceptualisations and practices changed and developed in line with the observations within the lesson. Some of this was hard to capture. Due to the ongoing, "long and narrow" focus of the research, "live" changes could not always be observed, although at times I was able to record reflections and observations within the lessons.

To investigate the process, I had four key questions:

- RQ 1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process curriculum?
- RQ2: What barriers occur to this process?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques maximise language production and development, and learner engagement?
- RQ4: How do learners perceive and respond to these approaches?

In this conclusion, I intend to approach these questions in a slightly different sequence. I will first outline the barriers and challenges of the context and review the contributions from the students. I will then go on to lay out in clear, practical and crucially teacher-friendly terms the overall approach to an ESOL curriculum that the research indicated.

Conclusions: Challenges & The Learners (RQ2, RQ4)

The Context

A course does not happen in a vacuum, as we have seen, and this space around the course offers barriers and disruptions. Not least of these is the *context* of the course. Large FE colleges enable innovation on a global scale, for example through resources and technology. The cost of this is a drive towards standardisation of approach, and a need for accountability which presents major barriers to innovation at a course level – the curriculum whose primary purpose would appear to be to create evidence that is "valued by managers and government ministers: statistics, charts and other forms of quantitative data" (Tummons, 2012, p.24) leading to an emphasis on standardised documentation. Of this, the key documents of relevance here are schemes of work and individual learning plans (ILPs). Managing these required documents proved to be a challenge, but in the end far less than imagined. The scheme of work was completed but only with activities, resources, and, to an extent, assessments. Placeholder "outcomes" were used in the scheme - suitably specific in appearance but at the same time open to a range of interpretations: "read a text and identify details" for example could mean a whole range of activities and responses, as could "use items of language to be decided in the course of the lesson." The scheme of work document then became a genuinely live document, using the traditional "learning outcomes" section to record what had emerged at the end of lessons. ILPs included loose yet still SMART placeholder targets to keep audit requirements happy, or were repurposed to develop retrospective records of what students have explored, using the looser phrasing as pre-planned targets. Although not explored in the research, a more rolling approach could also work with ILPs acting as a framework for a learning diary, including sections of "This week, we…" and "I still want to know about…." much as the ideas laid out by Lewandowski (2021) which included some forward planning but more importantly made space for reflection of what had happened.

On a more pragmatic level there are also mundane concerns which had an impact. During the research period, for example, I was unable to teach some lessons. The current model is far from mainstream, and unless the cover teacher were similarly inclined, there would be challenges in that tutor following the main teacher's own processes. An ends-means approach is the norm, dominated by a demand for teaching resources, and therefore during those periods the students experienced a more traditional classroom approach. In other circumstances, the work moved online for some lessons, during which it was certainly possible to use a more

responsive approach, but again, the tendency with online lessons was to move to the familiar style of teaching, based around learning outcomes to offset the discomfort of using an unfamiliar, or at least unwelcome, teaching medium. Certainly the effectiveness and workability of this model in an online context is something which requires greater exploration, although again EfA London's blog and guidance (e.g. EFA London, 2021) offer some suggestions as to how this might work.

It is also important to note my own role in the organisation at the time of the research. Being a more experienced teacher afforded me greater freedoms than a less experienced teacher, but this also means that I am approaching the curriculum with principles, rather than simply feeling. The very act of being a practitioner-researcher on an approved PhD programme means that I approached the course with a knowledge and an understanding of the underlying principles, not just experience. The context was crucial here again: I was not only an experienced and informed teacher but also working in a college which had suspended formal grading from internal quality reviews and instead relied on brief lesson visits and student feedback to inform the effectiveness of provision. What made this work, then, was not necessarily my experience, but rather conviction and an informed stance. There remained other issues which might have been a concern for an inexperienced teacher - language explanations, for example, or the ability to teach a lesson "off the shelf" where circumstances required it. This would suggest that novice teachers would need suitable training in the strategies and techniques outlined above, as well as in the appropriate language and with access to support and mentoring as appropriate.

Exams & The Learner-Centredness Conundrum

In the case of this course, at that organisation and at that time period, the presence of compulsory additional qualifications to boost funding cannot be avoided. This is not, however, universal practice in ESOL, and indeed has since been abandoned by the college in question. In any case, as we have already discussed, the students were largely welcoming of the thematic content of the qualifications, although whether this was simply because it linked to their own interests and to how they were presented alongside a wider range of language activities is impossible to say.

The impact of English language exams, however, is universal to language learning across the globe, and a significant feature of ESOL in the UK. They are, after all, linked to the highest levels of funding and for learners represent a stage in wider progression to further study or

employment. Whether the qualifications have sufficient parity with similar English language exams (e.g. Functional Skills or GCSE) to genuinely achieve this progression remains a challenging issue on a national level (Roden & Osmaston, 2021), but this lies beyond the scope of this research. Exams in the research setting of an FE college were a preferred requirement for funding and as a result they were a significant concern for ESOL teachers, learners and managers. However, as discussed in previous chapters, the students *did* value and respect the role of the exams, and the curriculum that developed could not help but be affected by the exams. Therefore, when developing this kind of agile emergent course, exam-focused content needed to be built into the programme. Negative washback (Taylor, 2005) was inevitable, therefore; as we have seen, due to the nature of the exam question structure, many of which were not always natural or obvious to students, and which certainly do not reflect the reality of real-life language tasks.

Exams, however, presented an interesting example of the challenge of learner-centredness. In chapter 2, for instance, we considered criteria for learner-centredness, and the absence of learner-centredness was one of my critiques of the current ESOL Skills for Life process. The relationship between the course design and the exams taken by students in this research demonstrated the tension between the curriculum and the different individuals involved in enacting it, much like the layers described by Graves (2008). Policy expected (and still expects) learning for integration and employment (see, for instance, Simpson, 2019, Foster & Bolton, 2018, or Higton, et al. 2019, p.21) and this is represented primarily through the achievement of qualifications. This is then passed to organisations who expect achievements as demonstrations of 'progress'. Students *also* expected and valued qualifications, although whether this is out of habit, instrumental need or a motivational recognition of progress is hard to tell. This is clearly similar to Graves' (2008, pp.149-150) description of a "specialist curriculum" where the intentions of the government and the instigators and guardians of the curriculum at a policy level are filtered through successive layers of leadership and control (managers, teacher-trainers) before eventually being enacted by teachers and learners. As a result, a teacher who approaches their role in a principled way, with the view that language learning is a good and useful thing in and of itself, regardless of qualifications, may see qualifications as an intrusive burden on the curriculum. This is certainly true in the tone not only of my reflections during the research but even within this thesis, where I have described exams as a "necessary evil". This tension is not limited to exams, of course, and is also apparent in the employability agenda, where policy, organisations and students seem to both value career-related content but where the teacher sees ESOL as having a much bigger role to play. Again,

this is clear in my reflections and indeed in this thesis. However, if I wish to claim any degree of learner-centredness, and, as in this case, the students *want and expect* exam preparation, then this is something that a learner-centred course needs to include, and include effectively.

So how to square this circle at a classroom level? In this research, the focus on the year-round curriculum content meant that when it came to exam preparation I focused on well-used strategies of using exam type tasks and practice exams in the period leading up to the exams. This was less successful than I would have wanted, especially in regard to the reading exam, where students felt the least confident, and in reality were the least successful. This was not a new phenomenon at this level - in previous years, success rates at the reading exam were far lower than either speaking and listening exams or writing exams - and the responsive, emergent curriculum did little to alter this trend. While speaking and listening and writing exams showed much the same, if slightly higher success rates, the reading exam passes remained the largest challenge for students.

Speaking and listening, and writing, are skills that were easily developed within an emergent framework, and as discussed in the previous chapter, had a much more predictable and "real" content (take part in a discussion, write an email, and so on) which could easily be built into the curriculum, with only a positive washback (Taylor, 2005). Even the fake elements of the SPaG test in activity 1 of the writing exam could be included; applying exam questions format for off-the-cuff practice activities for emergent grammar, for example, such as reordering words in a sentence, writing a sentence using a specific word or completing sentences from starters intended to produce particular forms.

5. Finish the sentences.

a. If I had had more time, ...

b. Since I am unable to ...

c. If I had the chance, ...

d. For me, being creative means ...

e. There were moments when ...

f. It would be amazing ...

Figure 19 Screenshot from a City & Guilds ESOL sample Level 1 writing exam task.

In an unrealistic exam context, such activities are very likely to merely demonstrate "language-like behaviours" (Long, 2015) but developed in a realistic, emergent context, where the prompts were linked to emergent language from the students, these became meaningful, useful practice of discrete items.

It would be easy to spend time and energy disparaging the reading exam content, but this is something about which little can be done. On reflection, in order to incorporate exam content, a more holistic, gradual approach needed to be included. This could have been through developing exam type questions for texts the students have already read, ensuring that general discussions about the text type, features, purpose and tone are included throughout the course (which did, after all, include significant amounts of reading activity), or even just developing speed reading strategies with the students.

Student Beliefs & Expectations

A further challenge for the learner-centredness focus was that of the students' expectations over course content. It was clear in the student feedback that they expected the teacher to be knowledgeable and to *explain*: a word which came up again and again during the focus groups. They also expected explicit grammar instruction and requested specific input at several stages in the course. Did this sit at odds with claims towards learner-centredness and emergence? I would argue not - at no point in my planning or since did I say that explicit instruction was not 'allowed' - and as we discovered during the research, it is sometimes necessary. It is also worth noting that in other research it is never suggested that input be purely implicit – our discussion, for instance, of Long's Focus on Form in chapter 2 highlighted that students *need* their attention drawing to key language items in order to facilitate learning (Long 2015, Ellis, 2015). Sweller (2017) in his article on cognitive load theory is typical in assuming that English language teaching as a field is inclined toward emulating first language acquisition with purely immersive approaches, yet misses the point entirely. Instructed second language acquisition theory has already dismissed the notion that implicit learning is the ideal way to learn (Long, 2015; Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022) and even Meddings & Thornbury (2009), describing a conversation based approach, make it clear that explanation and practice are necessary features of language learning. The findings suggest, quite clearly, that explicit instruction is necessary and expected by the students – where this differs was simply through the question of where the language being explained and practised came from.

The reality of the teacher's role and the student expectations as evidenced in both the course and the student feedback on the course, was that the teacher maintained a role as a leader in the classroom, and as the holder of knowledge and understanding. Indeed, responding to learner language during interactions, as we have seen, required that a teacher be skilled and knowledgeable about that language and about the appropriateness of the level of the input: for example at this level a metalinguistic grammatical explanation was sometimes the most effective way to get a structure across, particularly as students were tuned in to subtleties of grammar on elements such as verb forms (tenses, conditionals, etc.) and to aspects of vocabulary and had developed a reasonably high level of metalinguistic awareness. Had they been operating at lower levels of English this may not have always been possible or appropriate, of course. In such a context, I would suggest that a more lexical approach could be applied, treating grammatical structures as vocabulary, or perhaps avoiding metalinguistic explanations and preferring instead Meddings & Thornbury (2009)'s *recasting* - "Try saying it like this." I did, however, teach a very traditional "delivery " lesson early on during which we clarified metalanguage useful as a reference point throughout the course to speed up explanations, as well as having the psychological benefits of establishing trust in the knowledge of the teacher.

Conclusions - A Workable Alternative (RQ1, RQ3)

Throughout this research, and this thesis, the emphasis has always been on *teaching practice*. This thesis is not, and never was, intended as a generalisable statement on all education, but an insight into an individual course. However, such an insight has value for others, and it is in this section, addressing the first two research questions, where I will lay out the practical implications of the research for others in terms of their own curriculum practices. As a reminder, here are those questions:

- RQ1: How does an ESOL curriculum evolve based on emergent language developed through a process-curriculum?
- RQ3: What tools and techniques enable language production and development, and learner engagement?

Applying a responsive, emergent curriculum has been seen to work in contexts where more freedom is afforded to the participants to run the curriculum how they see best, from when the student walks in the door to when they leave. Cooke, et al, (2023) offer several excellent examples of this across various contexts. It is also workable in the relative freedoms afforded to the private language sector, such as those described in Chinn & Norrington Davies (2022),

although here emergence is often presented as a cautious aside to the primary EFL business of following a course book. Likewise, we have seen that it can work on a small scale, with a short sequence of lessons within a large college setting (Gallen, 2014). However, when considering a *whole* course, from start to finish, large colleges bring their own demands and expectations, often with a priority on the explicit measurement of progress. Where inspectorates are involved, this measurability element is even more acute; claims by Ofsted (2014) that they have no preferred style of teaching are hard to believe when their insistence on measurable progress, visibly tracked, requires a very specific set of practices which influence, in turn, classroom practice.

This research suggested that a responsive, emergent curriculum functioned, and functioned well. The linguistic coverage emphasised speaking, reading and vocabulary over grammar, writing and listening, but presented opportunities for these which could be exploited. The course which emerged was as rich and complex as any dictated by an external syllabus. Students enjoyed the course, and they learned from it, but at the same time expected the teacher to make the decisions. This coverage is not dissimilar to that found by Gallen (2014) and in the records of lessons in Winstanley & Cooke (2015), and as in all these cases, the language is as rich and as broad as any that might be "covered", if not more so.

As a result of this, and of other factors, the teacher's role remained one of power, but perhaps of sidelined, quiet power - the teacher becomes a curator of activities, rather than a setter of goals. This required a certain level of awareness – in particular an ability to identify a learning opportunity in the lesson, and to be able to act on it. For an experienced teacher, this was perhaps much easier, but it raised the question of how this could be managed by an inexperienced ESOL teacher; a point to which we will return later.

Learner-centredness as enacted through direct negotiation of content was difficult for students in much the same way as it is through the setting of targets (e.g. Schellekens, 2007; Roberts, et al. 2004). Negotiation took a different approach so that the focus was not on negotiation of outcomes, but the negotiation of meanings and themes (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000). Thematic- and meaning-focussed negotiation enabled students to make their own decisions about the course, and therefore with the sense of agency and control this engendered, but without requiring them to develop the specialist knowledge and awareness required by target setting and monitoring.

Control of overall sequence and structure remained with the teacher, but the students have a clear input, conscious or otherwise: dialogue and discussion was not limited to the classroom interactions but also to the classroom direction, if not always consciously. The position, and indeed *positionality* of the teacher is clear in this context and was less overtly focussed on social action, as is the case in many descriptions of participatory ESOL (e.g. Bryers, et al, 2013, Winstanley & Cooke, 2015). This also presented an ongoing and interesting discussion, which we have previously touched on, around the moral value of imposing my own more left-wing beliefs on a community of potentially more conservative students – for example, settled migrants with a more politically and socially conservative set of beliefs.

When following these approaches, the local context had an enormous influence. This group was characterised by its sense of permanence in the local community. Many of these students were part of a Pakistani community with long, multigenerational history and connections in the local area. Other students were part of communities which had been present in the area for a number of years, including a large Kurdish community and a growing Moroccan community in the area. This sense of *settledness* was clear in the topics and themes, and perhaps also contributed to the more conservative beliefs of the students, as evidenced in the comments and opinions expressed.

Planning and management of the processes was essential: it was not enough to walk into the classroom with the hope that language would just happen, although there were occasions where this *did* happen. What differed here from an outcomes driven approach was that planning centred around activities *without* a pre-decided language learning outcome in mind. As a result, I managed to isolate a planning structure and sequence of activities (see below). This has positive implications going forward for teacher development and training, in particular for novice teachers where more structure can be beneficial in order to develop other skills (e.g. active listening and language analysis) before then exploring and reflecting more widely on the very open ended descriptions and ideas presented in guidance such as Cardiff et al, (2007) and Meddings & Thornbury (2009).

Within the college environment, the inescapable accountability agenda required me to fulfil certain obligations, which proved a challenge to do in balance with the emergent curriculum. Formal assessment remained a challenge, and exam washback could not be avoided.

As noted above, and in several instances in this thesis, this audit-emphatic context is what marked this research as different; the most recent successful example of participatory

pedagogy in any form is one which is carried out almost exclusively outside this context in the work of EfA London, captured in e.g. Cooke, et al, 2023 where this limitation (and strength) is acknowledged from the outset "our account centres on experiences of PE [Participatory ESOL] in and around one particular organisation." (Ibid, p. 4). This is no criticism of that research, and as limitations go it is one which could equally be applied here. It is an acknowledgement that this kind of responsive process curriculum, whether fully participatory or "weak" (ibid.), can be effective in multiple contexts, and engage learners while still satisfying the needs of the organisation. Strategies were developed, however, to offset the imbalance between the context and the approach which are important in developing this approach in a context like a general FE college which at the time of writing, shows no sign of change in culture or stance to learning.

Core Principles

So what did all this look like in practice? What did the course look like, and what patterns of practice were involved? More importantly, what can a responsive curriculum look like? The outline of the course altered as the course progressed, and I found myself refining and focussing the approach. Beneath all the activities, however, there were three core principles.

Participation – students were positioned as equal partners in the development of the curriculum through negotiation practices (e.g. Breen & Littlejohn, 2000, Thornbury & Meddings, 2009), such as selecting themes and topics of relevance at the beginning of the course, and through more critical participatory approaches (Auerbach, 1992, Bryers, 2013), for example analysing a problem based on prompts. This included activities such as looking at texts on the theme of the cost of living and a discussion around strikes causing fuel shortages. Most frequently these prompts were textual, rather than Freire's (1970) visual codes, although the visual metaphors such as those used in the *Reflect for ESOL* project (Cardiff, et al 2007) also informed lesson structures.

Emergence – the notion of emergent language was central in the research and in the course – language items, grammar, vocabulary and so on, emerged from the activities the students participated in. This occurred in several ways - direct student questions on how to express themselves; direct student questions on meaning in texts; or in the form of error correction, both of form and of social appropriacy. One lesson, for example, developed from a student's declaration that "all Asian people commit benefit fraud." Most frequently, however, language emerged through being an active listener (Auerbach 1992), observing and listening to students and (in my reflective commentary) "filling in the gaps". In this last, my tendency was to focus on

communicative gaps - an absence of knowledge expressed as errors or as simply not being able to express a concept effectively. On reflection, in line with Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) more work could have been done here to celebrate the language which students contributed themselves, rather than being so obviously based on the language deficit – perhaps a habit of the teacher.

Interaction – This is a crucial element of the language learning process (e.g. Long, 2015, Nation & McAlister, 2010, Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022). Without it, learning a language remains a purely academic task, much like learning Latin or ancient Greek, rather than a practical task, with non-interactional activities becoming too often prone to pretend language, Long's "language-like behaviours". The students in this research clearly valued this as an aspect of language learning (conscious knowledge) but ultimately for most students in an ESOL class, the motivational intention is *tacit* knowledge, and with this, the ability to communicate clearly and with focus in particular contexts (e.g. Sidaway, 2021), not the recitation of rules of grammar, or for mental exercise. The value of interaction, especially in speaking and writing, is that it required students to make use of their linguistic resources to make meaning, with new linguistic forms growing out of those linguistic resources. During the course, I broadened the concept of interaction to encapsulate not only interpersonal interaction, but also interaction between students and the texts they were reading or listening to and interaction between themselves and the wider social contexts of their learning. In practice, learning opportunities developed from a wide range of concerns and concepts; discussions, arguments, conversations, texts, and local, national and indeed international issues.

Structure and Sequence

The curriculum emerged in several ways. Sometimes activities were planned, for example, exposure to a text and reactions to that text, or through specific prompts prepared in advance.

The initial activities led in different, sometimes unpredictable directions. Sometimes they led to formal input sessions on specific language points, for example the lessons on conditionals or relative clauses, but these arose as the course developed rather than being planned in advance. At other times, there was direct and explicit negotiation of content, leading to specific classroom activities (with students requesting tense structures, for example), while at other points in the course other factors influenced the course content including current affairs, key dates and festivals. From all of these opportunities for language use and development emerged, which were exploited and managed by myself as the teacher.

The organising principle followed, generally, the process described below.

Typically a lesson or sequence of lessons began with some kind of **stimulus**. These were drawn from a range of sources, including real world authentic texts, images of situations or problems, published teaching materials, or simply comments and questions from the students. Many lessons and sequences of lessons arose from questions or conversations already occurring in the lesson. A speaking activity itself could also be a stimulus for language, (such as those described in Cardiff et al. (2007)). The lesson, for example, in which we explored the causes and consequences of fuel shortages followed roughly this process, or the class timeline of educational experiences. Other lessons focused on texts as a stimulus - the use of texts as a stimulus follows on from many of the ideas in Meddings & Thornbury (2009), Morgan (1998, 2002) and Auerbach (1992) who all base lessons on texts. Texts tended to come earlier than in participatory, critical approaches where they are included (e.g. Cooke, at al, 2023) as part of the "broadening out" stage, *after* issues and themes were developed. That said, where texts linked back to student discussions, for example, on the cost of living, the stimulus could inform both single lessons and sequences of lessons.

Most often, once the stimulus was supplied, we moved onto some form of **exploration**. Recordings led to discussion (such as the lessons based on a Mumsnet video), texts led to grammar, and then subsequent discussions led to further work, for example, a piece of writing. The stimulus, whether task, text or image, prompted language production, and created in itself a communicative need, whether in response to the stimulus itself or expanding from it in unexpected directions. This exploration sometimes took the form of **problematisation –** Freire's (1972) notion of problem-posing education, further developed conceptually in Auerbach (1992) and Auerbach & Wallerstein (2004). This is where the students and I worked collaboratively, to analyse an issue in the stimulus, as we did in the session on the fuel strikes, where the stimulus was a national issue of relevance to the students (a fuel shortage), and the exploration of the issue formed the structural basis of the lesson. Another example of this occurred where students were informally discussing the quality of the food in the college canteen. Interestingly, these *problematisable* themes were often spontaneous rather than pre-planned or formally negotiated (as in participatory ESOL): indeed, this immediacy of need led to arguably greater engagement than some form of lengthy needs analysis such as that suggested in most guidance on curriculum design in language teaching (e.g. Nunan, 1988; Nation & Mcalister, 2010), or indeed in Long (2015) or Breen & Littlejohn (2000). Even my own activity at

the start of the course, attempting to outline and describe themes and topics of interest and relevance to the students, lost some of its relevance as the course progressed.

Exploration of the stimulus presented opportunities for **interaction**. As noted above, the interaction took several forms; interpersonal interactions between students and between students and teacher, but also with a wider meaning; searching for details in a text, for example, or responding to a listening task. The definition of interaction moved beyond the not trainee teacher model of interpersonal interaction but also became extra-personal – interaction with texts, with language, with images or with issues. Rivers (1987) defines interaction as "*using* a language when their attention is focused on conveying and receiving authentic messages." (p.4) involving both listener and speaker. We can build on this – students in the research interacted with written texts, in the form of reading and responding both personally and linguistically to information and ideas laid out in the text – as Rivers goes on to say, "comprehension is a process of creation." (ibid.)

The next steps generally involved some form of work with emergent language forms. Meddings & Thornbury (2009, p.20) break down the steps of working with emergent language in considerable detail, and I use their terms in what follows. There was usually some form of **capturing** of the emergent language. This took the form most frequently of language being recorded on the whiteboard at the front of the room, either directly through my own noting during the lesson, or by giving students "their language" on sticky notes or slips of paper, for these to be owned and then shared at the end of lessons. The purpose of this was not only to correct errors but to encourage students to attend to the language - as we saw in chapter 2, the communicative focus on linguistic items in context was far more powerful than simply making an educated guess at what might come up: the language much more clearly belonged to the students on a motivational level, suggesting thereby that this might then link more closely to their current interlanguage – Thornbury (1997)'s "noticing the gap" (p.326).

Once it was recorded, the language, it was subject to some form of **calibration.** Meaning-focussed communication was already occurring in the interactions, but this led to opportunities for making that communication more effective. This occurred in three main ways: **repair**, **refining**, and **celebration**. Most frequently, perhaps, language was **repaired**, where the accuracy gap between the student's communicative intention and the most effective way of doing so in English was bridged (see the dialogue in chapter 5 above). **Refining** involved taking language which was already communicatively effective and improving it: in effect, saying to the students "you could say it that way, but this way is better." Less frequently, but equally

important, was the **celebration** of 'good' language - where students contributed useful additions to the linguistic 'hoard' of vocabulary and grammar, or made novel or indeed multi-lingual contributions, enriching language as equal owners of both languages. The simpler notion of recasting and recording needed, on reflection, to engage more with the positives that students bring to the classroom.

Language forms, both structural and lexical were much more likely to be supplied to the students at exactly the right time for that student, meeting that communicative need (Ellis, 2015, 2016; Long, 2015). This occurred in lessons, and frequently, often through negotiated meanings (see the excerpt described in chapter 5) between the teacher and between student peers, in a similar way to how it is described in Meddings & Thornbury (2009) and Gallen (2014). However, more commonly, the "calibrated" language was shared with the whole group through a post-activity analysis of language emerging via the whiteboard. This was sometimes done using explicit explanations (cf. Long, 2015, Sweller, 2017 and others) where students had language explained to them. This formed a double purpose – as well as sometimes being the most efficient method of clarifying and correcting, it also helped to establish trust and confidence with the students – see, for instance, their appreciation of effective explanation described in chapter 5.

It was, of course, not enough simply to expose students to the form once and once only, so some form of **revisiting** was also necessary. This was often done as a class plenary at the end of a sequence of activities and sometimes led to the more traditional "input" lessons, grounded in the emergent language, rather than being pre-defined on a scheme of work or syllabus. Again, on reflection, a more structured and planned opportunity to revisit the language, for example done through learning diaries or similar, might have helped to clarify and expand this process. My own record was kept as the course progressed, in the form of a *retrospective* scheme of work using the space traditionally reserved for learning outcomes to record and annotate emergent language from those sessions, but this was purely for my own purposes. While images of whiteboards and so on were shared via a Teams page, the effectiveness of this was limited to the frequency with which students accessed that resource. In some cases, the formal recap took the form of traditional input lessons, for instance where a conditional form arose in a discussion on education, and was explained, but clearly warranted more thorough explanation and contrasting with other conditional structures.

Revisiting also occurred within the context of a subsequent stimulus, for example, on the course, an issue with the difference between present perfect and past simple which was asked

about directly by a student occurred in a subsequent text (an exam revision text) which presented an opportunity to revisit the language again – here my own conscious knowledge of what had emerged previously allowed me to highlight this again to the students.

Ending a lesson, or sequence of lessons, and moving onto the next stimulus was perhaps less clear cut and took many forms. Sometimes, the work stemming from a specific stimulus had run their course, and it was very much a sense of tiredness – an intuition that all the work for that theme had been completed. More frequently, the final transition was based on something new occurring, for example, lessons around International Women's Day. While the course used the familiar (for me) notion of linking series of lessons by topic, once a stimulus had been exhausted, sometimes even within one or two lessons, a new stimulus on that theme was chosen – for example in the sequence of lessons on work and employment, activities were selected which further explored the theme. This is something which, perhaps, stemmed from my own experience as a teacher – listening to the students and getting a very unscientific feel for how the classroom community was feeling at that time. A more structured approach could be applied, on reflection, for example, using the problem tree model to analyse issues in a topic would identify different elements of that topic from which the subsequent stimuli could be selected or developed.

Recommendations - A Responsive Curriculum for ESOL

In summary, then, the sequence looks something like the diagram in figure 19.

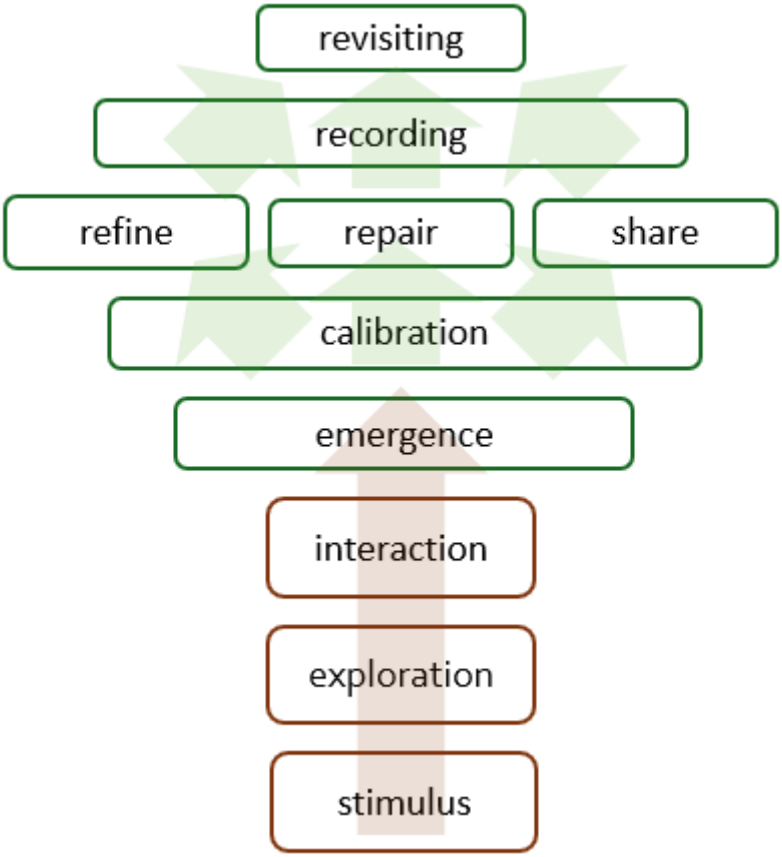


Figure 20 the Emergent Curriculum Model

- **Stimulus** – something happens in the classroom – a text, a conversation, an image.
- **Exploration** - the stimulus is explored – ideas are discussed, texts are responded to, conversations encouraged and developed. Where appropriate, these are **problematised** – where the stimulus links to issues of concern or power, then the subsequent tasks are engaged in action.
- **Interaction** – while engaging in this exploration, the students interact with each other, with the teacher or with the text, The focus is on meaning making, not on accuracy.
- **Emergence** – from the interaction language items emerge – students discuss, students ask, students *use* the language in some way, and erroneous, novel or simply interesting forms arise.
- **Capturing** – these forms are observed and recorded in some way
- **Calibrating** – working with the emergent language to develop the students' interlanguage through the following processes:
    - **Repair**: errors are corrected - "say it like this, (because…)",

    - **Refining**: more effective means of communication are suggested, language is explained, and students suggest language they would like to have explained
    - **Celebrating**: interesting and novel language is celebrated and shared
- **Recording & Revisiting** – emergent language is noted, then reviewed and discussed again at the end of lessons or in subsequent lessons. More detailed explanations are given where necessary.

This is intended only as a simple overview – after all, the sequences of "calibration" activities at the top of the diagram were usually intertwined and simultaneous. These things happened in three dimensions as well as two, with many stages operating at once and overlapping: more like the branches of a real tree, rather than the simplistic metaphor laid out above. Emergence, for instance, occurred at all times, with discussions and language items arising during the writing of emails where we discussed the food in the canteen, or as part of formal checking after the fact. The nature of the interactions was guided by the teacher, but even with restrictions and direction, the interactions were ultimately down to the interplay of the students. These different discussions inevitably give rise to different language items, brought together by the teacher.

Once all these opportunities have been exhausted, the class and the teacher move onto a new stimulus, itself suggested by the interactions that have come before, or negotiated on a case-by-case basis – leaves, perhaps, which fall from the tree and form the hummus in which the new seeds of learning can grow.

Stages like these are indeed laid out in, for example, participatory ESOL, particularly in the three-stage approach of *making meaning, broadening out, going deeper* (e.g. Bryers, 2015) but these stages are intentionally loose, and focus on thematic and social development rather than on how language might develop within them. More detailed descriptions do exist (e.g. Winstanley & Cooke, 2016) but these again focus what might emerge rather than attempting to pin down specific processes – again, an intentional decision, but one which leaves little help for what to do once the language has emerged.

Crucially, this is also slightly removed from the social activism of participatory ESOL – throughout the research I queried my own role as teacher. Teaching is an essentially political and power-laden process, but where my beliefs and those of the students sat slightly at odds, it could also be argued that I was imposing my own personal social and political beliefs on the students. As a result, by attempting to empower students, I could also be *dis*empowering them.

This process allowed for space in which we *could* be political but also include more mundane and less socially active elements: practicalities *and* protest, as it were.

The emphasis in this approach was not on the purely linguistic either, as the description in Meddings & Thornbury (2009, p.20) suggests. Instead the emphasis was on creating the conditions for language and analysing that language, and while the emphasis made space for the social and political, this connection is played down, and, as with Chinn & Norrington-Davies (2023) the idea of emergent language was explored as the be all and end all.

Neither was there an emphasis on *tasks* in the sense of "real world" tasks, at least, such as the activities described in Long (2015). Where TBLT suggests clear guidance on identifying and exploring real world linguistic tasks that they may or may not have to do, and using these as an organising principle, my structure was much more open. Long's (2015) definition of focus-on-form was crucial, however, with language supplied at the point of need, rather than at the whim of the teacher or worse, a creakingly dated curriculum document.

Some mention also needs to be made of the importance of texts as a stimulus: engaging with written texts in this research formed the primary source of language from outside the class, and interaction with texts often proved to be a useful source of new ideas and discussions, not to mention developing comprehension skills. Whether authentic or not, these were crucial in bringing in elements of language which perhaps could not have occurred naturally.

My attempt in this research has been to pull together these themes and approaches, pulling the best of each one into a single process curriculum – the social engagement and visual codes of participatory ESOL, the emphasis on interaction and emergent language in *dogme* ELT and the clear underpinnings of second language acquisition developed through task-based language teaching.

Recommendations – Challenges & Barriers

Accountability

This overriding climate of accountability in the post-16 sector is not likely to change at any time soon, and yet many of the structures of that accountability are rarely, if ever, seen by their users as anything other than a chore: tasks such as individual learning plans, target setting, tracking and monitoring processes have all been questioned, even from the very beginning of Skills for Life, when such practices were laid out (Sunderland & Wilkins, 2004). Lewandowski (2021)

presents a potential alternative which focuses less on 'hard' targets such as learning discrete, measurable linguistic elements but rather a reflective process focussing on both 'hard' and 'soft' goals according to what the students want. This gentler, reflective model of targets and tracking progress could align well with a responsive approach, and going forward a responsive model would do well to incorporate some form of reflective journal to help capture and revisit the learning. Certainly this individual record of learning, formed after the fact, would have enhanced the process for the students, and perhaps led to a greater understanding of what had been done on the course. Some form of learner diary, with weekly reflections, and, if desired by the students, weekly goals.

Standard practice in course planning is to set *a priori* outcomes, which makes little or no way for the emergent and unexpected. Instead, then, I suggest that the scheme of work document be laid out with *activities* in advance but updated with language items after the fact. Such a document, linked to the students' own records of activities, would create the evidence of progress which is so desirable under an audit culture. Thus evidence would be created of progress and change. This would not only meet the needs of organisational audit, but also help students to recognise the changes in their understanding and skills. It also develops students' reflective skills which are often a crucial element in many of the fields in which the students may wish to work.

Teachers

The importance of the teacher has not been diminished by this research. Indeed, the teacher remains an important part of the classroom community, albeit one with an altered role. Therefore, training would be needed for new and experienced teachers not just in the devising of activities (as we have seen, plentiful resources exist for this, after all) but also in the skills of responsiveness. An ability to actively listen to the students is crucial; although not mentioned in the reflections or the data, many of the activities depended entirely on my listening to the students and making decisions over the action. This might present a challenge for some teachers. In order to maximise the learning from this active listening requires that the teacher be able to first identify the language as worth exploring: is it an error which can be dealt with easily and quickly, or is it an error which needs more careful analysis and practice, and be relevant to the rest of the class, and thus justify, perhaps, a structured lesson looking at the language. Alternatively, is it an item of language worth celebrating and sharing with the rest of the class. This would require a shift of focus in teacher training and novice teacher support, to include a focus on the following:

- Analysis of learner language, to include a non-deficit approach that involves sharing interesting new emergent language.
- Listening to student interactions and making judgements about appropriacy of input based on the previous points.
- Setting up and monitoring activities for students
- Strategies and activities to practise language (e.g. simple language activities which can be used to practise *any* language item, for example simple drilling)
- Selecting and developing activities from texts

Such a list is not here presented as exhaustive, but is rather indicative of appropriate content for novice teachers. Current subject specialist teacher training, particularly on well-known courses such as CELTA (Cambridge English, 2022), focuses on developing several of these, albeit within an outcomes-led framework, and would take relatively minor tweaking and restructuring to focus the course on learner language as the starting point, and developing strategies away from using materials – a *dogme* CELTA, perhaps.

Generic teacher training in the UK FE context, for example the Level 5 Certificate in Education and PGCE is already problematic for ESOL teaching: it is often focussed on generic skills in teaching which are reliant on a shared language between students and teacher. As a result, it relies heavily on subject specialist mentors for specialist pedagogy. New teachers coming through this route would benefit from a more structured subject specialist support, as would their mentors, although this is arguably already the case for novice ESOL teachers.

Students

ESOL students are a gloriously motley crew, superdiverse and complex, and while one class may have some surface similarities to another, the experiences and personalities represented in each group of students is unique to that class. While on the face of it, they may be a collection of individuals, the social and community aspects of the classroom are an essential part of the learning process. The highly individualist approach of the ESOL learning journey, where the needs of the one are paramount, fail to take into account the essential component of the ESOL classroom - human interaction. This responsive model places interaction front and centre, and interaction is the prime mover of all things in the class.

Levels

While the AECC may be a limiting document, levels of language proficiency will always be a concern for teachers and managers. Yet all levels, however defined, are arbitrary, and all classes have the famous “spiky” profile of ability. As the group profiled in this study have shown, specific language abilities in a group labelled “Level 2” ranged from post-Entry 3 (S2) to almost native-like proficiency (S15) and occupied all points in between, and this is not an unusual range, by any measure. Mixed level classes are not unusual in ESOL, especially in community-based provision where student numbers may be lower, and classes made up of students with an even broader range of ability.

To teach groups like this with fixed outcomes requires complex differentiation strategies, some of which could be demeaning or demotivating for students - “No, this is only for the Entry 3 students.” To have a more open-ended model, then, allows for students to make their own way in the language and to take from the lessons what they need.

Suggestions for further research

While this research has uncovered the answers to some questions, others remain. This was a case study, and as such focussed on one teacher and one group of students. It can be compared, of course, to similar activities, such as those outlined in Chinn & Norrington Davies (2023), and perhaps some universals could be drawn from such a comparison.

There is also space for an exploration of the reality of ESOL course planning. The practices described herein represent my own experiences, but also consciously and unconsciously informed by conversations I have had with teachers in my own and other organisations. Inevitably, given the power structures involved, teachers are inclined to say the right thing when talking to inspectors and interviewers, not to mention line managers. During my time of writing this thesis, I was involved in two Ofsted inspections, during which I spent significant amounts of time explaining the curriculum process to the non-specialist inspectors. The conversation was full of references to targets, goals, structured outcomes, and so on; a metaphorical crossing of the fingers, perhaps, but clearly compliant with what was expected. Similarly, at a job interview in 2023 I described the curriculum process in much the same terms and referred to the research in the PhD as an exploration. Against this performative backdrop, then, where challenging these models is restricted by the power confines of education policy, it would be interesting to see whether teachers do indeed toe the line, and if not, what do they actually do?

On a more personal, practice-based level, I would like to further refine the model I developed to include more careful tracking and recording. As well as using the whiteboard captures and course records, I would like to experiment a full and systematic use of a learner diary which students could use to record new language and to identify their own achievements.

***

Leaves

2024. I am riding my bike along a country road in Yorkshire, reflecting on the metaphors which have brought me though this thesis. Like my bike ride, this learning journey has had purpose and intention, but also one which has seen diversions and false starts contributing to the learning. Sometimes it has been like cycling uphill in a storm, pushing hard against the wind and gravity of difficult concepts and challenges. Sometimes it has been closer to freewheeling downhill, although as any cyclist knows, this too can come with dangers.

I reflect on the wheels, the cycles of learning and of research, which while appearing to drive the forward motion, in fact only transform and shape the energy that the learner, the researcher, the *teacher*, puts into it. Unlike bike wheels, however, the cycles of learning and research are much less straightforward, and, if drawn accurately, would more likely look like a ball of tangled string.

I take a break and rest my bike against a nearby ash tree, disturbing a squirrel in the branches. The tree is the first, last and most important metaphor of this thesis. This research has its roots in many years of experiences and reflections yet is only now producing leaves. While *roots* and *leaves* might suggest a beginning and an end, in reality this thesis, and the research it represents is just part of a much longer process of learning and developing. This is simply the end of a season; before long the leaves will fall, decompose and their nutrients will be absorbed once more into the tree.

Glossary

AECC - Adult ESOL Curriculum. A curriculum document which defines the ESOL levels, based on the adult literacy standards and curriculum of 2001.

CEFR – Common European Framework of Reference for Language. An internationally recognised document which lays out performance descriptors of language at different levels, ranging from A1 to C2.

CELTA – Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults. An internationally accepted certificate in English Language teaching which is usually studied full time over four weeks, or part time over 20.

EFL – English as a Foreign Language; where students are typically resident in non-English speaking countries, and learning English to use a secondary language, often, but not exclusively, for business, academic or leisure purposes.

ELT – English Language Teaching – a blanket term for the general field, but frequently used to describe EFL type provision.

ESL – English as a Second Language. The term usually used in the USA and Australia to cover both ESOL and EFL provision.

ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages. Learning English in order to live in an English first environment; in this case people born abroad but now living and working in the UK.

FE – Further Education. Tertiary education in the UK, for individuals aged16 or older, often with a vocational or practical focus.

ILP – Individual Learning Plan. A not uncontroversial document in which a student's goals, targets and barriers to learning are recorded and used as a basis for their review.

SfL - Skills for Life. A programme of adult literacy, numeracy and language provision which ran from 2001 – 2010.

SPaG – Spelling, Pronunciation & Grammar

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Appendix 1- Research Consent form

Research Consent Form

I am doing a research project about the courses I am teaching. This is for a PhD from the University of Sunderland.

Purpose of the Research

I want to find out about how we can make a course based on your ideas and experiences. We will be doing activities in class, and we will work together to choose or find the language you will study on the course. I will be comparing the language and the work we do in this class with the work we do in other classes to find out how things are different between the lessons.

I will be doing my best to make sure you have a good experience in the class and help you to pass your exams. If something is not working, I will stop or change it.

Consent

So I can study this, and write about it, I need to ask your permission to use some information from lessons.

I might need to:

- Use photographs or scans of work done in class, including your writing.
- Record lessons and write down what happened in them.
- Ask my colleagues to come and watch lessons and write down what happens.
- Audio recordings of mock exams or speaking activities
- Interview you on your own or in small groups.
- Use the things you say in interviews to help me explore the research.

I might ask you for some personal information, for example which country you are from, what languages you speak, and about your interests and goals, but I will keep this confidential.

I will not use your name on any of the research information, and if I use some work with your name on, I will hide your name. If there is personal information so someone could recognise you I will not use it, or I will change it.

I will not publish photographs of you, videos of lessons, or audio from lessons. I will only write down things people say.

I will not use any personal information you gave to college: only information about yourself which you give me in the class.

I will only publish the information in my thesis, or in journals and conferences for education professionals. If anything is published publicly, so other people can read it, I will make sure they won't know who you are.

You do not have to part in this study. Your participation is voluntary.

You can change your mind and stop at any time, even if you first said yes.

It will not affect your exams if you say no.

It will not affect your relationship with any of your teachers in Kirklees College if you say no.

***

If you sign below, it means that:

- You have read and understood what this form says.
- You are happy for me to use information from the class as outlined above.
- You know that you do not have to take part in this study. And even if you agree, you can change your mind and stop at any time. No problem.
- If you agree to this, it has nothing to do with your being a student in college. If you agree to take part, or if you say no, college won't know, and it won't matter. They will treat you the same.

You will get a copy of this form to keep for yourself.

Name: ..... Date: .....

Signature: .....

Appendix 2 – Anonymised Group Profile

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
S1*	F	Pakistan	Italy (lived for much of childhood and adult life)	2	Italian, Urdu, Punjabi, English	completed secondary school to Level 3 equivalent in Italy	n/a	I need for my studies, for job, speak with doctor, help my kids with school. enrol to university for nursing course	walking, books, henna
S2*	F	India	n/a	13	Urdu, Gujarati, English	SSC in India (broadly similar to GCSEs)	Dressmaker (India)	Finish ESOL designer “need English for UK life.”	sewing, baking, cooking

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
S3*	F	Pakistan	n/a	15	Urdu, Punjabi, English	SSC in Pakistan, Level 1 Certificate in Childcare	none	complete L2 childcare English for living in the UK, for a job	baking, sewing, cooking
S4*	M	Russia	n/a	4	Russian, English	BSc Physical Education	management roles	go to university, English for socialisation and communication	History, Sports
S6*	F	Morocco	Spain (for 22 years)	3	French, Arabic, Spanish, English	ENS (Sport) (a Moroccan teacher training qualification)	Not working at present. Has experience of teaching Arabic	start own business, become a teacher of Arabic.	sport, baking

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
								English for study, work, communicate with others	
S5	F	India	“London”	12	Gujarati, English, Hindi	BSc Chemistry, Diploma in Medical Technician, Diploma in Physiology	not working at present. Medical technician in past. Physiotherapy.	in future: study for Master’s degree. English for study	cooking, reading

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
S7	F	Iraq		13	Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish	Diploma in Kurdish language (university level) Currently doing L2 teaching assistant cert	Worked as a teacher in Kurdistan, current p/t SEN support in primary school.	Work as a teaching assistant in schools. English for work and continued studying	cooking, sewing
S8*	F	Iraq	No	15	Kurdish, English, Arabic	completed high school in Kurdistan, completed Level 1 childcare qual. Currently on L2.	working now. (did not disclose job)	start a beauty course. English for jobs	hairdressing, watching TV dramas “Misses her family but likes UK.”

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
S9*	F	Born Sri Lanka, describes self as "from Italy"	Italy	10	Italian, Sinhalese, Tamil and English	Advanced Level Diploma in Nursing	Worked in Italy for an airline " VIP Hall Ground hostess in airport"	"For independence, help to son's school work, find a job"	Baking, cooking, watching movies
S10	F	Pakistan	No	10	Urdu, Punjabi & English	BA Urdu, Islamic Studies & Political Science. Started teacher training.	Not working currently, previous work as a teacher of Urdu, including "phonetics"	Find a job and get a driving licence	Reading, watching movies, creative activities, e.g. .sewing
S11*	F	Pakistan	No	8	Urdu, English, Punjabi	Degree in economics	No	"teaching" For work – teaching	Cooking and cleaning

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
S12*	F	German, but of Egyptian heritage	Egypt	3 years	Arabic, German, English	Finished high school	Working as an interpreter in German, but also has worked in a clothes shop. Developing own business as a baker	GCSE English & Maths, further study	Reading, cooking, writing, eating!
13	F	Pakistan	No	13	Urdu, English	“intermediate college”	Child care, school support	To speak and communicate with others”	Watching TV.
14*	F	Morocco			French, Arabic, English	Absent for peer profiling activity (see Chapter 4) but consent was given for participation.			

ID	Sex	Country of birth	Other countries	Years in UK	Languages (in order given by student)	Educational background	Employment background	English needs and future plans	Notes
15	M	Nigeria			Yoruba, English				
16	F	Pakistan			Urdu, Punjabi				
17	F	Pakistan			Urdu				
18	F	India			Hindi				
*participated in focus group activity.									

Appendix 3 – Kirklees College "Classroom Expectations"

Every class, every day…

- Greet your students at the door, ask how they are and create a sense of belonging
- The register must be taken and submitted in first ten minutes, then updated for late arrivals
- Check all students are **wearing their lanyards, coats are removed** and that students are Ready to Learn according to the Ready to Learn guidance in classrooms
- Reiterate expected behaviours and check devices are on silent and won't be a distraction.
- Students who arrive late should be challenged appropriately
- Display clear learning outcomes and refer to these throughout the lesson; ensure they cover skills and behaviours development
- Have a relevant starter activity to ensure learning takes place from the start
- Recap past learning to ensure students can recall and retain knowledge and skills
- Have students set an in-class target to identify what they will aspire to achieve in the session
- Plan chunked activities with checks on learning throughout
- Plan opportunities for students to link the new learning to previous content and new concepts
- Utilise the Quality First Teaching Strategies to scaffold and support those with SEND
- Ensure support tutors are briefed on the planned activities and required approach
- Use the English and maths boards to develop students' skills linking to the vocation
- Have a succinct end to the session where learning and targets are reviewed

Consider your planning……. Have you planned a lesson which focuses on students?

1. What do you want the students to learn?

• Are your lesson outcomes student-centred? How do the lesson outcomes link to the awarding body criteria / intended outcomes? How do they promote social and emotional literacy?

2. What tasks have you planned?

• Keep your students engaged by using tasks that stretch their skills. Activities should vary in approach supporting both independent activities, paired work and group tasks

• Keep the pace appropriate by setting timed tasks with no more than 15-20 minutes of tutor input at one time

3. What assessment strategies are you using?

• Do these strategies link to your learning outcomes?

• How do you know that students have grasped the current knowledge and skills and can they link this new learning to past learning and bigger concepts?

4. How can students take ownership of their learning?

• Use sticky notes or card and ask students to clarify their starting and finishing point for the lesson keeping their aspirations high

• Consider how you use information from the student's ILP (Quality First Teaching Strategies) to support students with SEND to work toward their EHCP outcomes

5. Where are the opportunities for wider skills and knowledge development?

• Build in opportunities to link tasks to the British Values

• Use considered inclusive and anti-racist resources that embed EDI

For help support and guidance please visit the KC TLDI Hub

Appendix 4 – ESOL Levels

ESOL levels are based on the national literacy standards devised in 2001. They do not always correspond directly to similar internationally used descriptors, but the definitions suggested below are a close approximation. (Based on SQA, 2021)

ESOL Levels	CEFR	Accepted EFL "levels" (as described by course books and other materials)
Level 2	B2-C1	Upper Intermediate
Level 1	B2	Intermediate – Upper Intermediate
Entry 3	B1	Pre-intermediate - Intermediate
Entry 2	A2	Elementary – Pre-intermediate
Entry 1	A1	Beginner – Elementary
Beginner/Pre-Entry	-	-

Beginners

The term "pre-entry" is perhaps misleading – it was originally conceived as a pre-literate level for adult native speakers with special educational needs due to a learning difficulty, an inaccurate description of simply not being able to use a second language.

Beginner ESOL is a complex, challenging area, arguably the most challenging of all levels. A beginner class may include students who have very little written or spoken English; almost Entry 1 spoken language but little or no written language; significant literacy in other languages, including the use of the Roman alphabet, but very little spoken English; or indeed any combination of the above. These students are then grouped together as "beginners" - a huge challenge for teachers.

Level 1 & 2

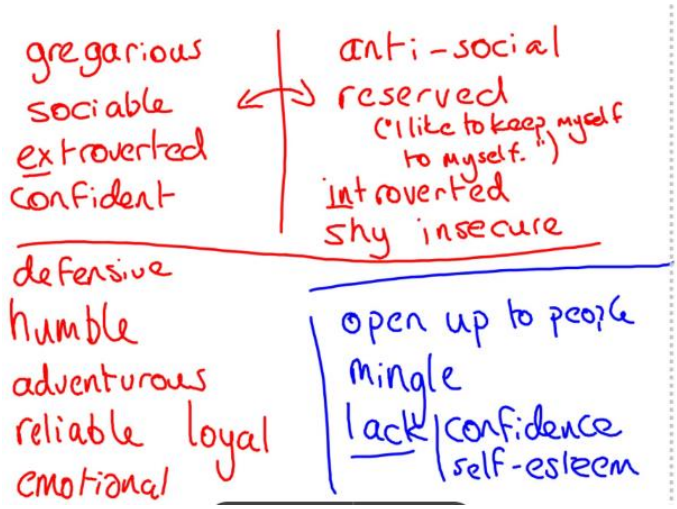
At the other end of the scale, Level 1 & Level 2 represent an ESOL proficiency equal to a GCSE in English (grades 1-4 and 5-9 respectively), at least in theory. I would argue that a Level 2 in ESOL is individually more challenging than a GCSE English, but these are rarely accepted as equivalent qualifications, and students instead often "progress" to Functional Skills at Level 1 after completing Level 2 ESOL.

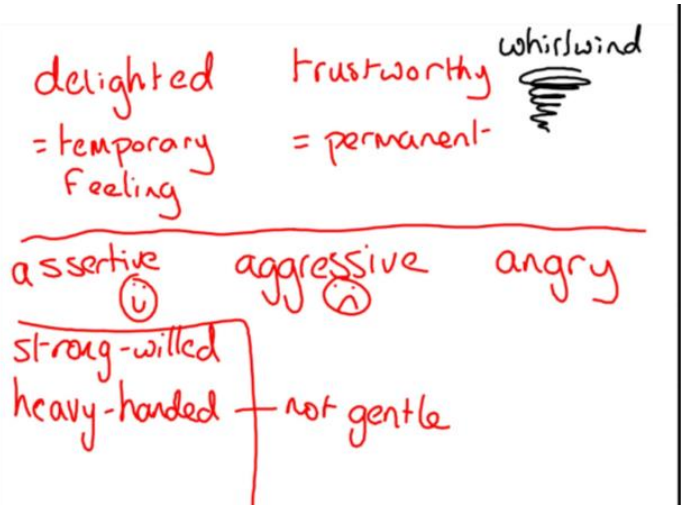
Appendix 5 - Excerpts from data

Course Content Data: Half Term 1

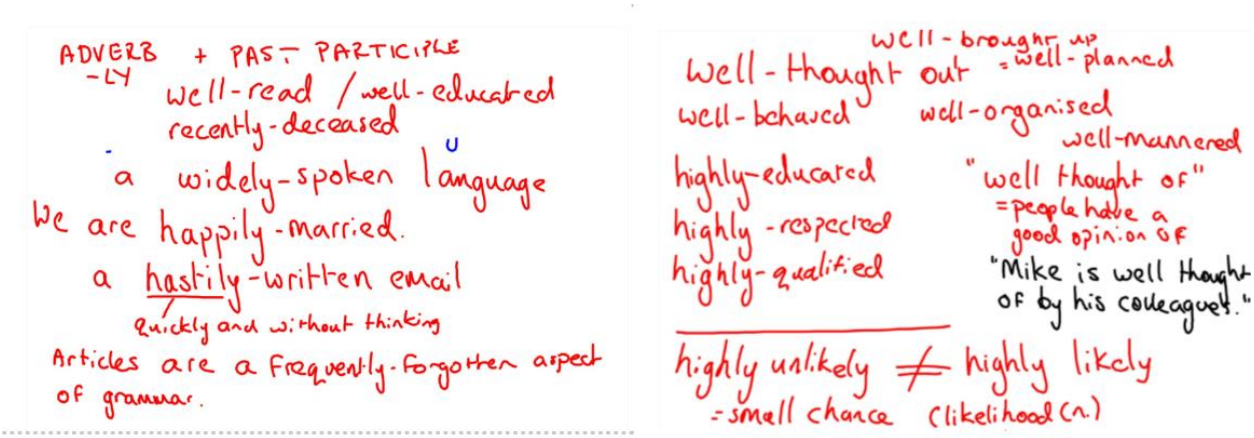
w/c	Wk	G	V	P	F	S	L	R	W	T	C	M	A	O	TI	SI	OI	Focus	
13-Sep	1a					1	1						1		1			Induction	Teacher led presentation on key info and ideas
	1b	1	1			1					1				1			GTKY, Induction	"Identity Pizza" activity "All being well…" "cope with" "complexion" "I was supposed to go but..", word order of "all" as an adverb
20-Sep	2a					1	1	1	1				1		1		1	Negotiaton, diagnos	Diagnostics = organisational expectation, topics discussion - Before topic discussion, had convo about thanking people, but also intro to grades of formality. "Time flies when you are having fun" "nosey-parker"
	2b		1				1		1		1	1				1		Personality	Pre listening activity led to discussion of language items. Quite complex adjectives e.g.defensive, introverted, extrovert, gregarious. collocations "property ownership, male chauvinist. Lexico-grammar e.g. adjective-noun-ed compounds e.g. strong willed, heavy handed. HWK set writing "the perfect"
27-Sep	3a		1		1	1					1		1		1	1		Fuel Shortage	fuel shortage discussion - based on convo when started. issues, challenges and discussions. Vocab - shortage. gossip, word of mouth, rumours, gramm - be used to
	3b		1					1		1					1			Multillingualism	Reading text vocab & synoynyms "first and foremost" "tremendous" Used a jigsaw structure to reading task, NO questions.
	3c		1	1		1					1					1		word stress	word stress, homophones, "stuff/whatsit/thingy" - enquiry from a student
4-Oct	4	1							1									English language	"write 4 sentences using English is…" forming adjectives using adverb-past pple. e.g "well read", US/UK English, vocab
	4b	1				1		1		1					1	1		English language	Linking from the discussion on Thursday I found an article on "Did you know this about Engish" and did a reading lesson based on this - ss had to find signiifcance of numbers, dates, etc. Then three questions focussing on grammar - present perfect, passive voice and present tenses.
11-Oct	5		1			1		1	1	1			1					Emotions	Describing emotions (Mental health week) - simple response task to diagram, images to prompt vocab - ss looked at images and described emotions and linked to wheel
																			Stimulated by previous week's discussions, talked abiout how to stay physically and mentally healthy. writing process / genre approach - read and analysed text (by me) and structured a

Screenshots of interactive whiteboard notes from lesson dated 24/09/22

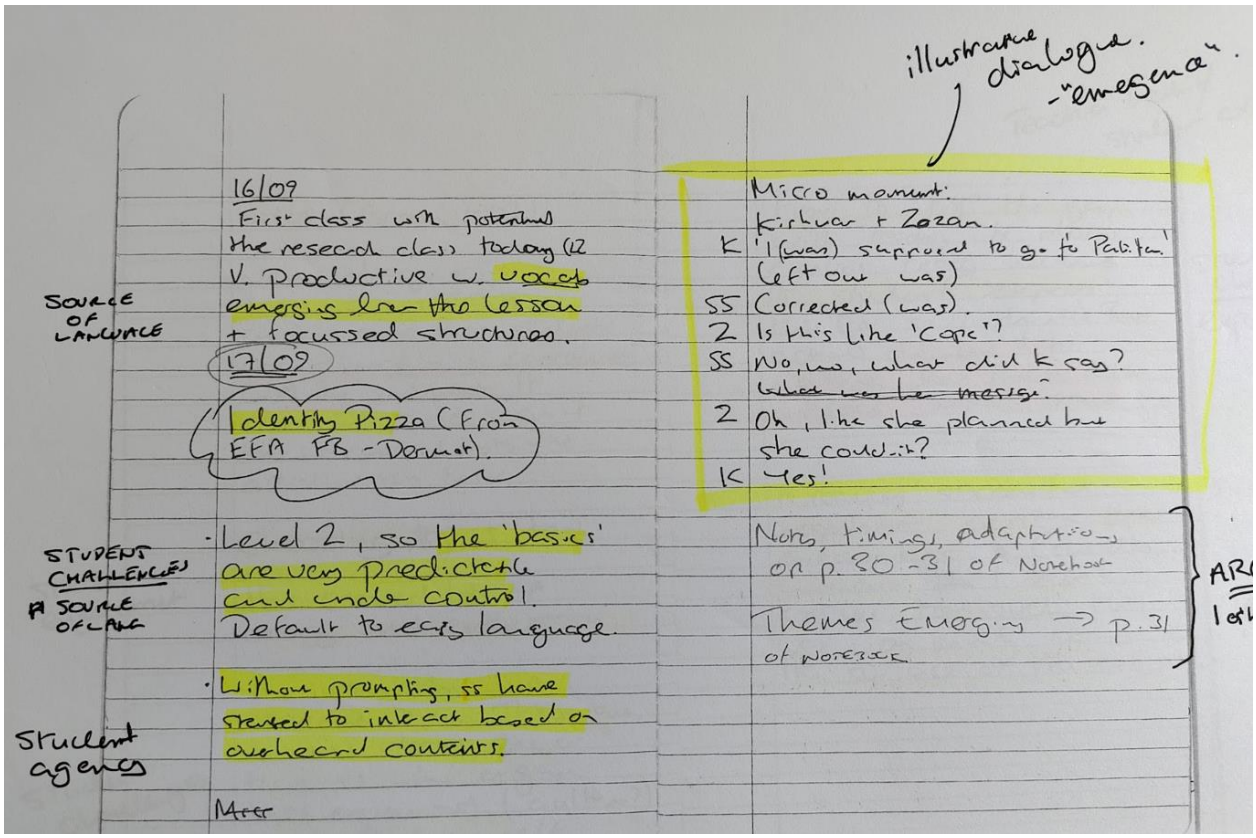


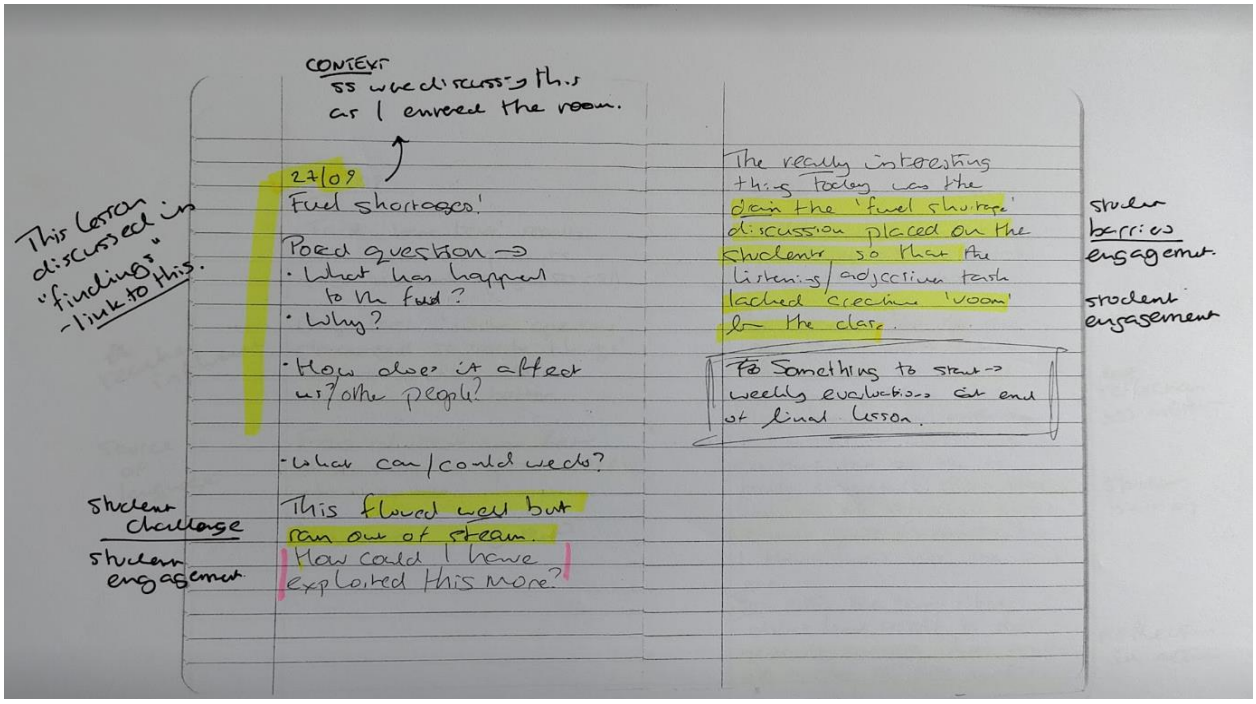


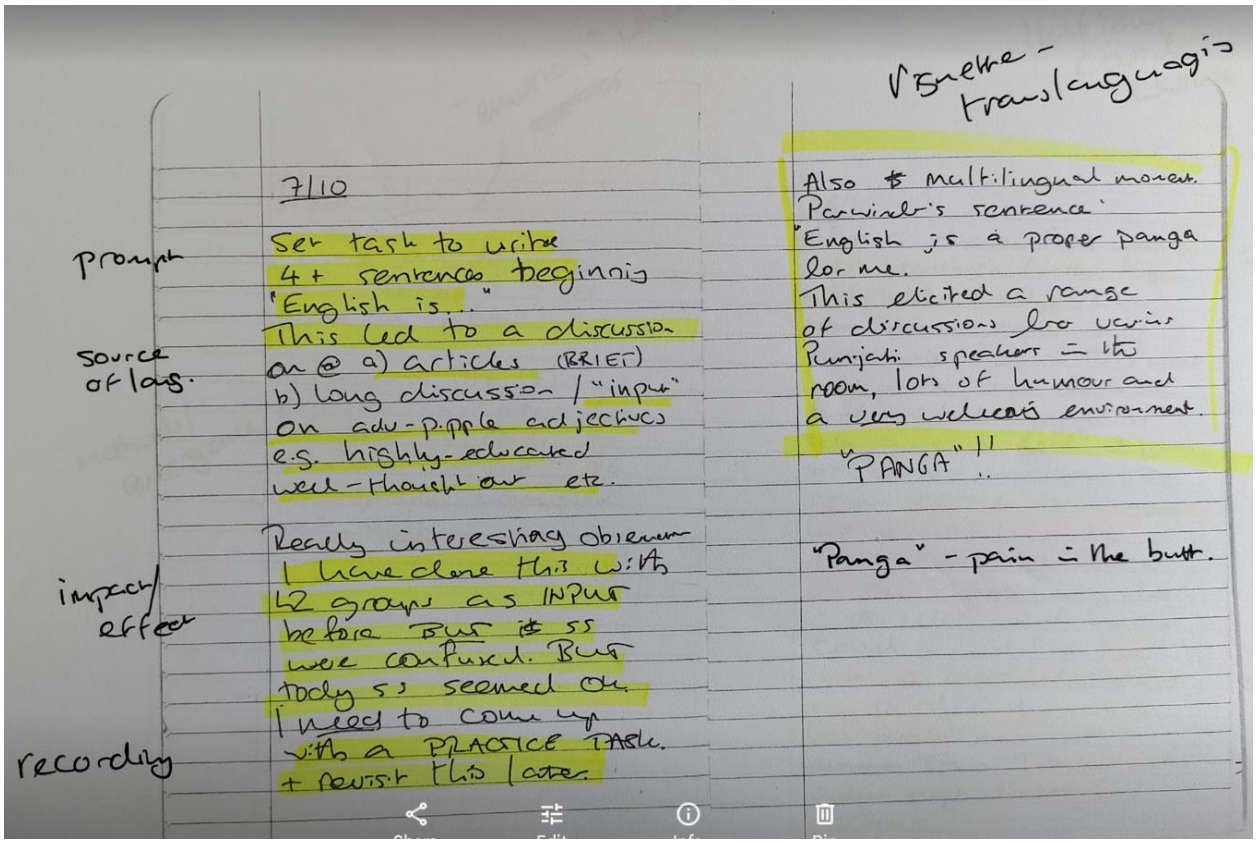
From Session on 7th October 2022



Teacher coded notes for sessions at around that time:




CONTEXT
ss were discussing this as I entered the room.
27/09
Fuel shortages!
Pored question →
• What has happened to the fuel?
• Why?
• How does it affect us/other people?
• What can/could we do?
This flowed well but ran out of steam.
How could I have exploited this more?
This lesson discussed in "finding" - link to this.
student challenge
student engagement
The really interesting thing today was the drain the 'fuel shortage' discussion placed on the students so that the listening/adjective task lacked creative 'room' for the class.
To Something to start → weekly evaluations at end of final lesson.
student barriers engagement
student engagement


7/10
Set task to write 4+ sentences beginning "English is..."
This led to a discussion on @ a) articles (BRIEF) b) long discussion / "input" on adv-pipple adjectives e.g. highly-educated well-thought out etc.
Really interesting observation I have done this with L2 groups as INPUT before but ss were confused. But today ss seemed ok. I need to come up with a PRACTICE TASK. + revisit this later.
prompt
source of lang.
impact/effect
recording
Variety - translanguaging
Also ↑ multilingual moment. Parminder's sentence "English is a proper panga for me."
This elicited a range of discussions for using Punjabi speakers in the room, lots of humour and a very welcoming environment.
"PANGA"!!
"Panga" - pain in the butt.

Student Focus Groups