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ESOL SIG

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ESOL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ESOL SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP

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IATEFL ESOL Special Interest Group Newsletter

Welcome, from the ESOL Co-ordinator.

Dear ESOL SIG Member,

I have definitely said this before but it deserves to be said again: I am extremely proud to be the ESOL SIG coordinator and for good reason. In September, Pauline Blake-Johnston ESOL SIG's website manager, flew all the way from Edinburgh to New York to present at the fifth annual Meeting Challenges and Exploring Solutions in the Adult ESOL classroom. She was an invited speaker and wowed her audience with great ideas to enliven grammar lessons.

This month, Mike Chick, the ESOL SIG's Newsletter Editor, was awarded the coveted Best Societal Impact Award for his "*life-changing work for the Welsh Refugee Council.*" They did not want to blow their own trumpets, so I am blowing them!

Don't forget to sign up for our PCE day entitled **ESOL: sidelined no more!** on April 17th in Manchester. The presenters are Jeremy Harmer, Rachael Roberts. Steve Brown, Philida Schellekens, Mel Cooke, Becky Winstanley, and Jo Gakonga. A veritable who's who of ESOL and ELT.

Also, watch out for the next ESOL SIG members' email which will include information about our upcoming webinars by two huge names in language education - Gabriel Diaz Maggiolli and James Simpson.

Take Care, Lesley

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JOIN US in Manchester 2020 for our Pre-Conference Day

ESOL - sidelined no more!

The field of ESOL is growing exponentially as is the global human crisis of forced displacement and migration. ESOL teachers, many of whom are volunteers, are having to navigate the complexities of this crisis head on. Our PCE day will look at how we are training ESOL teachers especially volunteer teachers, to ensure that they are equipped with the tools and techniques necessary to be able to address their learner's multidimensional needs.

We also have an incredible line up of speakers this year: Come & see Jeremy Harmer, Rachael Roberts, Jo Gakonga, Melanie Cooke & Becky Winstanely, Philida Schellekens and Dr Steve Brown

BOOK here: www.iatefl.org/conference/esol-sidelined-no-more

Newsletter Editor's Foreword

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ESOL colleagues!

It is heartening for all ESOL professionals, I am sure, that in October 2019, not one but two excellent books have been published about the ways in which ESOL is designed and delivered. The first*, ESOL Provision in the UK and Ireland,* edited by Freda Mishan, contains description and analysis of how ESOL is organised in several contexts around the UK and Ireland and highlights the key role that language plays in issues surrounding education and integration. The second, *Brokering Britain, Educating Citizens*, edited by Mel Cooke and Rob Peutrell, draws attention to the ways in which a participatory, bottom-up approach to pedagogy can be more effective in providing meaningful routes to citizenship. Both books contain accounts from teachers and researchers who explore and reflect on the ways in which government policies play out on the ground.

Likewise, this *December 2019 Newsletter* has a number of articles that describe practitioner and governmental response to the organisation and provision of language education – often in order to address the shortfall in funded provision. For example, the first essay is Bridget Stratford's terrifically inspiring account of the N.E.S.T project in Newcastle. In her essay, it's wonderful to read about the benefits experienced by volunteers, as well as those receiving help with their language development. This is something that I have personally experienced and also witnessed many times when organising voluntary ESOL courses - for people who often face the terrible difficulties associated with seeking asylum. Bridget's account reminds us how valuable and mutually beneficial it is to create environments in which people from different backgrounds can be brought together.

Similarly, the account of MA students team teaching ESOL at the University of Nottingham will hopefully inspire other centres of teacher education to explore the possibilities of organising volunteer ESOL programmes run by student teachers. The article by Helen Singer provides us with a fantastic opportunity for anyone interested in how another country (Sweden) sets about providing language education for migrants. I was envious and full of respect for the staggering level of support that Sweden offers its huge numbers of forced migrants – both linguistic and vocational - but even in such admirable conditions, challenges are faced by learners and language teachers alike. The final two articles in this newsletter focus more on the classroom than on policy. Jenny Field describes her research into the importance of taking our learners' educational backgrounds into account while Gillian Moore offers some excellent advice for those teachers about to enter the world of ESOL.

So, here we have five articles that cover both policy and classroom practice, voluntary and paid sectors of ESOL and experienced and learner-teacher viewpoints. Something for everyone, I guess. However, if you have an idea for an article – around the topics contained in this issue or around any issue that concerns the world of ESOL teaching and learning, then please do get in touch.

Enjoy the Newsletter. *Mike*

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North East Solidarity and Teaching By Bridget Stratford

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North East Solidarity and Teaching (N.E.S.T) is a student-run volunteer project which aims to educate and empower the refugee and asylum seeking communities in the North East of England. The project began in August 2016 when one Syrian family requested language support from Newcastle University and in response 8 students began teaching English for two hours, once a week. Today, less than three years later, N.E.S.T is now one of the major ways in which the region is supporting the forced migrant population living in the cities of the North East. With over 250 refugees and asylum seekers using the services and over 400 student volunteers managing and facilitating the project, N.E.S.T has become a large community, where integration is the central focus.

The project is based around language acquisition as this is the primary need of the majority of the learners accessing support. Service provision totals over 20 hours every week and this is spread over seven days. The weekly schedule includes: adult fiction reading, art classes, conversation groups, football and basketball sessions, community sessions, food donations, clothes donations, trips into the community, maths support and specialised curriculum teaching for children.

N.E.S.T is unique because it is not just that learners come to learn or come when they need support. N.E.S.T is a safe-space and a social hub. N.E.S.T is a community and a home for people who no longer have their own; a family for both the students who run the project and refugees who come to learn. It's a diverse and exciting environment. It is a place that despite huge differences in age, race, religion, sexuality, culture and background, life experiences, individuals work together in peace for shared progress.

This project demonstrates three things. The first is that there is a huge need for refugees and asylum seekers to learn English here in Newcastle. This need is heavily underestimated by many and expanding the knowledge of learners' needs is vital to improving access to learning for Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) learners.

Secondly, the project demonstrates that using student volunteers at Universities is a revolutionary approach which is very successful and has undeniable benefits for all parties involved.

Join us in Manchester in 2020

Finally, N.E.S.T demonstrates that in a world where the news starts and ends with Brexit and where Islamophobia, terrorism and helplessness are rife, there is hope and we can make a difference.

A total of 421 volunteers completed at least 2 hours (one session) volunteering with us during the 2018/19 academic year. 39.5% of our volunteers have volunteered with us on a regular basis (10 volunteering hours or more), a 4.5% increase from last year. If we exclude our 2 project managers, the total number of volunteering hours for 2018/19 is 8,911 hours. This is 4,988 more hours than last year. We have calculated that our project managers have contributed 1,925 hours this year.

This is based on them volunteering 35 and 20 hours per week, every week. The 35 hours includes the time they volunteer directly with the learners but also the time spent on the logistics and admin of N.E.S.T. Including our project managers' hours brings us to a total of 10,836 volunteering hours. To put that into context, 10,836 hours is equivalent to 451.5 days. To understand the impact of those who volunteer at N.E.S.T, we created a questionnaire. During their time with the project, all volunteers felt they had benefitted in at least one area. The top three benefits volunteers felt they had developed were self-confidence (88.9%), cultural aware- ness (77.8%) and social life (72.2%).

The N.E.S.T volunteer base is made up of around 600 students with around 400 active student volunteers. Putting aside the direct benefit to student volunteers, it is important to consider what it means to have 300 young people who work, study and live in the region. The project is an example of integration not only to the volunteers themselves, but also to the fellow student community (making up a large percentage of the local population), and to the local communities who interact with students. Students who are part of N.E.S.T will leave the project promoting support for the forced migration community and talking of the positive experiences that they have had with them. It is unusual to have such strong support from this demographic. If the local community observes how students are interacting with refugees and asylum seekers, the students may act as enablers for meaningful interactions and they could facilitate the growth and cohesion of the local community.

We know that a large part of the North East population are happy to have refugees and asylum seekers here but we also understand that difficulties caused by cultural differences and perceptual misunderstandings can occur often where there may be deprivation and sudden increases in demand on local services and support.

Part of this may come from a lack of understanding of the social norms and typical behaviour which is accepted in Britain. It may also come from frustrated local communities who feel unable to express their opinions without being castigated as racist. In addition, pressure on certain services may increase waiting lists and reduce available places - leaving some members of the existing community feeling unsupported. We are aware of the cost of translation services and also the financial consequences for issues such as inappropriate waste disposal. We understand that there are issues with anti-Muslim prejudice and we want to reduce the mistrust and misunderstandings which occur. On top of this, we want to make the integration which does occur meaningful and not simply organised communication. We understand that in order to create a better atmosphere for our learners we need to create communities in the region that work for everyone and which are based on values such as democracy, free speech and mutual respect.

We aim to bring in aspects of collaborative care and a multidisciplinary approach to tackling social isolation and community integration. N.E.S.T provides a holistic care package to refugees and asylum seekers who attend which is designed to not only improve their own standard of living and quality of life but also to empower them to be independent, integrated and valued members of the local community. This year we have improved our English Language provision, helping learners build their confidence when communicating with their neighbours and other people in their local area. Additionally, we have continued to educate learners about the culture of the North East through trips into the local community with N.E.S.T Explore. Our holistic approach has given learners the skills to integrate into their local communities, developing the relationship between forced migrants and the region.

Omar and Jack

Omar was 15 when he was helping his family move their herds of cattle across their farmland in Sudan. Armed militia attacked, killing their animals and separating Omar from his family, some of whom were murdered in front of him. He was forced to flee immediately with nothing. He was alone, hurt and terrified. He walked for weeks across Sudan and through Libya. He was forced to move only at night, under constant attack and threat of danger. After surviving the crossing at sea, Omar moved across Europe just hoping to find somewhere he could stay safely and make some sort of future for himself. He stayed in the 'Calais jungle' before crossing via lorry to Europe.

Eventually, dispatched to Newcastle at the age of 18, Omar found himself safe from threat of murder but still hurt, still terrified and still alone. This is where N.E.S.T came in. While Omar was unable to access college because of a long waiting list, someone told him about N.E.S.T and this is where he described "life started again". Omar started learning English. He started playing football. He made friends with other young Sudanese men and with students of all ages and nationalities. He was given a coat and new trainers. He was given books and became part of something.

Omar became Omar again and was no longer a refugee, a migrant, someone who was rescued from the sea or someone who survived the lorry crossing.

Meanwhile the volunteer who supported him also changed. Jack was no longer just a history student. He had become part of Omar's story, he had helped someone, he had changed a life. He had heard stories which had changed his perception of the refugee crisis and he had pushed himself out of his comfort zone. He could now communicate effectively, teach English, lead other students and become more employable. Omar is one of the 250 learners at N.E.S.T and Jack, one of over 400 volunteers.

Heba

"I was introduced to N.E.S.T through Ala'a and started volunteering on a weekly basis in September 2016. I initially started teaching 'one to one' sessions, like everybody else in the group. However, at the start of my volunteering I was unable to maintain consistency every week; whenever I had a free day I would simply pop in and help out. This is one aspect about N.E.S.T that I really like, as a volunteer they offer you flexibility on when you can and cannot attend; and each person is not expected to attend when they have other commitments such as those to do with studies or family. The best thing about N.E.S.T is that everyone is welcome to volunteer when they want without feeling a sense that they have to. We all choose to come and do what we do, and that is very, very important. Once I had more structure to my days, I began volunteering more regularly at N.E.S.T, and with each session I attended I could see the project grow and grow. I built a good relationship with my regular students and was able to observe the way in which they learned, helping them to move forward and progress each session. As I continued volunteering, I became more involved with the N.E.S.T activities, interacting and socialising more with the volunteers and the students. The number of people attending continued to grow and grow over time, leading to problems of more students than volunteers attending the sessions. It was decided that it would be a good idea to start up a beginner classroom; the idea coming from my co-volunteer Erfan. This was beneficial as there were many beginner level students, making more sense to teach all of them in one class, reducing the need for more volunteers. I started to adapt my teaching style for it to become more suited to a class setting than one-to-one. To begin with, we had around 10-15 students or so in the classroom and 3 teachers. Two of us would teach at the front of the class, and one of the teachers would go around the classroom helping students who were struggling. We found this method was really useful as everyone was receiving the help they needed. It was also helpful to have Arabic speakers to teach the beginner classroom (Erfan, Areej and I), as during that time most of the learners attending were Arabic speakers. This ensured we were able to talk to them in a language they could understand.

We continued this class for several months, with it growing in size (25 students and more) each week. Again, we reached a point where it became difficult to manage the size of the large class and we also had more volunteers than needed in the classroom (4 volunteers).

Another issue we faced was that students were learning at different paces to each other, so it was difficult to know what to teach each lesson to suit each of the service users. The next step was for me to start up another classroom for beginners in English, starting from the alphabet; with the original class now named the intermediate classroom. Here I originally taught with Majed and we began teaching around 6-10 students; teaching them the alphabet, numbers, family topics and sentences used on a day to day basis. In accordance to the increasing numbers of students joining N.E.S.T, the classes became bigger and bigger. More classes were formed to meet learners' needs, these were focused on conversation and grammar. I felt as though the teaching was going well at this point and I was seeing progress in some of the students. I was also able to build very close relationships with my class. I found it very important to allow time for socialising and joking during teaching as it helped them learn better in a fun environment.

By the end of the academic year, there were around 15-20 students in this class. After the summer holidays, when N.E.S.T started back up, I began teaching the same class; however, with a different teacher alongside me, Seemaa. As the summer holidays were long, many of the students had forgotten their English skills and there were quite a few newcomers, so we had to revisit certain subjects. When revisiting the topics, we thought that it may be important to change our teaching methods into more interactive teaching, incorporating games and exercises into sessions. We found that this technique was a very good way of consolidating memory and teaching. As the year continued, the class reached higher numbers and we could see the students enjoyed the lessons as they were becoming more enthusiastic. We began monitoring progress of students with notebooks, writing activities and weekly homework. When we started giving homework, we realised they would remember topics better, therefore, we encouraged more of the students to complete these tasks. We also increased the interaction in sessions, creating group work exercises and team games.

Another position I have taken up at N.E.S.T this year is project lead for the Basketball club. It is a weekly Basketball club aimed at improving integration into British society whilst improving conversational English. It has been a great success for N.E.S.T as it has been one of our fastest growing projects. Many volunteers and students attend the club and find it beneficial for both their physical and mental health.

To me, N.E.S.T is so much more than a project that provides English lessons to refugees and asylum seekers. It is a place for everyone to feel safe and welcomed. Respect and dignity are two of our biggest principles. It is a place for people who may have experienced the worst of things to come and enjoy themselves, relax and smile. N.E.S.T is happiness, it is made up of the kindest and strongest people I have met, and I truly consider this project “a big family.”

Bridget Stratford co-founded and now manages North East Solidarity and Teaching, a Newcastle University Students' Union (NUSU) Go Volunteer project. N.E.S.T is a student movement for the forced migration community running seven days a week with the aim of educating and empowering the refugees and asylum seekers living in the North East.

Do you follow our webinar series?

If not, WHY not?

In the last year we have produced webinars from:

Mike Chick, Pauline Blake-Johnston, Sam Shepherd and Becca Reed
Differing ESOL Perspectives from Wales, Scotland, England and the USA

Gabriel Diaz Maggioli
Making learning visible: What research claims and the reality of the adult ESOL learner

Judy Kirsh (in conjunction with NATECLA)
Teaching ESOL Learners with ‘basic’ literacy needs – where do I start?

Scott Thornbury
ESL: An Ecological Perspective

Carol Lethaby
The brain is behind the operation: teaching strategies that are supported by evidence

Philida Schellekens
Creating effective learning activities in the multi-level classroom

Michael Perrone
Second Language Assessment: Meeting the socio-educational needs of our ESOL/EFL learners

#whatalineup

Team Teaching to Support Refugees

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By Cora Lindsay, Jane Evison and Renata Seredyńska-Abou-Eid

Background

Most of us involved in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) would agree that knowledge of the host country's language is essential to comfortable adaptation. However, persistent cuts to funding over many years have meant considerable reductions in ESOL provision for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. As a "dispersal centre" under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, Nottingham receives significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers. Statistics from organisations working with the Nottingham community indicate that when asylum seekers and refugees were asked how support could be improved, more English language support was the most common suggestion. (See, for example, reports on www.begin.org.uk, and the Nottingham Citizens Independent Sanctuary Commission: February, 2017.) As tutors on the Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (MA TESOL) programme at the School of Education at the University of Nottingham, we saw an opportunity to fill this gap in provision.

Our students at the University of Nottingham, can work towards a Nottingham Advantage Award alongside their main degree programme (https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/careers/students/advantageaward/index.aspx)

This is a programme set up primarily with a focus on employability and is run by the Careers and Employability team. Students in this programme take modules relating to a number of areas, including mentoring, cultural awareness, entrepreneurship, volunteering and work in the local community.

A recent study of teaching practice on MA TESOL programmes indicated that very few UK ELT-related programmes offer teaching practice modules, while the same study reported that most students expect and would like this as part of their programme (Papageorgiou et al, 2019). On the current MA TESOL programme at the University of Nottingham, there is no teaching practice opportunity for our students, and this is something they constantly request. Our students all have some ESOL teaching experience before they begin the course. We refer to them in this paper as 'student teachers' as they are not only students but also teachers.

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In 2016 we set up a module, 'Team-teaching to Refugees', on the Advantage Award programme, with the aim of achieving two aims in particular: to fill the gap in ESOL provision for the migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking community, and to offer our student teachers and other students at the University with teaching experience the chance to engage with the local community and to get teaching practice.

Over the last two years, our student teachers have run weekly two-hour team-teaching sessions over six weeks providing ESOL support to refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and others from the community who are looking for ESOL sessions. The majority of the student teachers are either on the MA TESOL or an undergraduate Modern Languages degree, but we have also had student teachers who are studying politics, biochemistry and molecular medicine. They have come from a wide range of countries, including the UK, Indonesia, Vietnam, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and China.

Research Project

In April 2018, we were given funding by the University of Nottingham to investigate the experiences of our student teachers on the 'Team-teaching to Refugees' module. Our project aimed to get information in three main areas: (1) their knowledge of refugees, (2) their perceptions of the culture of their teams and (3) their thoughts on the experience in light of the theoretical input from their MA TESOL programme.

A series of interviews of up to 40 minutes were conducted with 11 of the 13 student teachers in 2017; these were transcribed and the data coded along two key themes: (1) Knowledge of Refugees (see Fig. 1) and (2) Team-teaching Experience (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 1: Knowledge of refugees

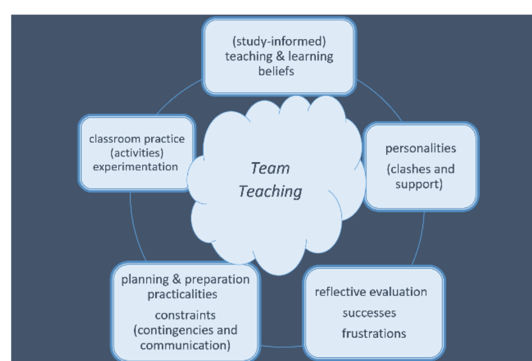

Fig. 2: Team-teaching experience

Findings

The findings indicate that before undertaking the teaching module the student teachers had mostly stereotypical and not necessarily positive views of refugees. Some participants stated that it was their 'first time to interact with refugees' and noticed that their learners were 'nice people [with] enthusiasm to study and to change their life' (Interview 4). Similarly, educational aspirations of refugees were observed by another participant who noted that their learner wanted to continue their studies in the UK. This positive reflection was, however, slightly overshadowed by astonishment that the learner 'was kind of clever' (Interview 6).

Regarding learning about the refugees' background and family status, the student teachers had varied experiences. On the one hand, it is apparent that some teaching teams expressed little interest in their learners' cultural background and admitted that in class they 'did not really speak about their [learners'] background' because there was 'nothing, in particular, to get to know about their culture per se' (Interview 5). Yet, many student teachers were content with their learners' openness and willingness to share cultural and personal information. Therefore, during the sessions, 'there were some times that [they] actually talk[ed] about their [learners'] culture' (Interview 9), and their families and food in particular. Although these topics may have been quite sensitive for the learners, the student teachers approached them with caution and curiosity and some teams observed that their learners 'talk a lot about their families' (Interview 6). Because the student teachers were aware they 'had to be very careful about [...] differences' (Interview 9), one of the teaching teams astutely used a slightly awkward situation of food sharing during Ramadan to learn about the tradition of fasting in Muslim communities.

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Hence, in terms of these teachers' knowledge of refugees, it was clear that, for those interviewed, their most salient understandings were created during the teaching sessions themselves. When told to the interviewer, stories were often articulated as surprising discoveries about the complexities of the refugees' lives. It is clear that the module provided an opportunity for these student teachers to learn about refugees and challenge stereotypes.

Team teaching

Regarding the experience of team teaching, the findings articulate a varied picture, emphasising the different ways the groups interpreted the notion. On the MA TESOL, we cover team teaching in our module on teacher development methodology, but our interviews suggest that the way it is theorised on our programme is not really that applicable to the refugee teaching situation. Bailey et al.'s (2001) metaphor of team teaching as learning to dance goes some way to helping understand these student teachers' experiences. However, the teachers in Bailey et al.'s study, who were able to reflect in quite sophisticated ways, were in stable, long-term teaching situations and relationships with their colleagues, and, to extend the metaphor, were learning traditional ballroom dancing as a pair. Our teachers, on the other hand, had to choose their own dances; different groups chose very different ones and very different ways of working.

Some of the groups were satisfied with the efficiency of their organisation, joint planning and delivery of the sessions and noted that 'small team teaching worked' (Interview 5).

Others admitted that planning 'was a really complicated part of teamwork' and in practice decided that individual delivery of the sessions was more flexible as the student teacher 'could control and [...] arrange the class by [themselves]' (Interview 6). The latter group noted that this individual approach guarantees 'each teacher their own opportunity to teach' (Interview 6) while co-teaching gave a lesser chance of practice.

For us, as teacher educators, we saw this experience as a way to help us challenge how we model team teaching and to consider a new model for team teaching in short-lived, unfamiliar contexts. Teachers in ELT are becoming increasingly mobile - there are lots of short contracts and people are finding themselves in new businesses and situations. Although we wanted our student teachers to be able to reflect on, and explore, these issues, for the student teachers themselves the novelty of the situation, the pressures, the sometimes frantic nature of getting their preparation done was intense. Their reflections in the interviews stopped as soon as they left the dance floor, so to speak, so that they weren't ready to step back and theorise to the extent that we had hoped. We would like to feed these insights into future teaching on our teacher development.

Theory and Practice

Comments about the desirability of teaching practice and the chance to apply their theoretical knowledge from the MA TESOL to a professional context came up more than once in the interviews. Interviewee 4, for example, noted that 'it would be great if [teaching practice] was a requirement'. It was also evident from many of the interviews that the student teachers had taken on board and were aiming to apply much of the theoretical content they had covered on the MA programme. Thus they spoke about the need for 'scaffolding' (Interview 1), 'issues around motivation' and 'error correction' (Interview 2), as well as some discussion of 'the use of PPP and task-based learning' (Interview 4). On the MA TESOL we place considerable emphasis on communicative language teaching methods, and awareness of these approaches was evident in the student teachers' responses to interview questions about methodology. One interviewee noted that she 'tried to design the lesson plan communicatively'. The same respondent, however, was also adamant that the refugee learners needed 'clear grammar knowledge' and described a session where she taught 'the simple past and the future simple' (Interview 2).

There was also evidence of some differences of opinion related to the place of grammar between our native-speaker student teachers and the non-native speakers. It is interesting to consider what all this tells us about persistent disparities between theory and practice as well as questions of possible pedagogic cultural bias. Although we encouraged our student teachers to engage critically with 'theory' on their course, they still saw theory as 'pedagogic practices that experts say we should try to use' without considering the broader sociocultural context.

Implications and conclusion

This research shows that it is possible for overseas teachers studying full-time on a TESOL Masters programme in the UK to engage with the complexities of team teaching groups of refugees, and we believe there is convincing evidence that the experience was beneficial for their professional growth. Our student teachers not only benefitted from the teaching practice, but also from the opportunity to teach in a multi-lingual setting and to learn something about the complexity of 'the English context'. This research project has also indicated to us the importance of doing further work and research on the refugee teaching programme. We would, of course, also like to be able to interview and get feedback from the refugee and migrant learners, but there are challenges around this in terms of ethical issues as well as the reluctance of some of the learners to participate on account of their vulnerable status.

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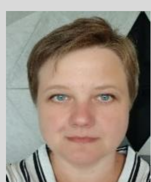

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The Swedish Experience

By Helene Singer

In the past five years, the Swedish reception of refugees has multiplied many times and this has meant that the teaching of Swedish for immigrants, SFI, has faced numerous challenges. In this article, I would like to detail one of these challenges in particular. It concerns a large group of young, unattended refugees who are trapped in the system due to the lengthy time needed to process their individual claims for residency in Sweden as asylum seekers / refugees. This has frequently resulted in a situation whereby Swedish language teachers feel that they have taken over responsibility for issues that politicians have not wanted, or not dared, to address.

Sweden has, for the last century, been a country where the population emigrated. The largest migration occurred to the United States during the turn of the century as many people attempted to follow their dream of a better life. However, in recent decades the situation has changed, and Sweden has become one of the countries in Europe that receives the biggest, per-capita number of asylum-seeking refugees. Some of things Sweden is famous for are its strong economy, its equality and its health care system. As a result, many people also come to Sweden as economic immigrants and also as love immigrants. In 2015, 1.6 million people of Sweden's population of about 10.2 million were born abroad, which represented just over 16%.

The most common citizenship countries, for persons who immigrated the same year, were Syria, followed by re-immigrant Swedish citizens.

The refugee crisis in Syria caused a record number of asylum seekers in Sweden in 2014 and 2015. In 2015 alone, 162,877 applied for asylum in Sweden, which is a doubling from 2014. In October 2015, approximately 10,000 persons applied for asylum in Sweden each week. In addition to refugees from Syria, another large group was unaccompanied youth from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Somalia as well as Afghans who had lived in Iraq for a long time. A very high majority of the unaccompanied youths were boys / men who stated that they were under 18 years of age. A total of 35,369 unaccompanied youths applied for asylum in 2015.

After 2016, the number of asylum applications fell radically, mainly after increased border controls against Denmark and Germany. For example, there were just over 1,000 unaccompanied applicants for asylum in 2017 and even fewer in 2018.

Due to the large numbers that came to Sweden in a short period of time, the processing times at the Migration Agency, the department responsible for granting or refusing residence permits, became very long.

One of the groups most affected by these delays were claimants who were under 18 and unaccompanied when they arrived, but had turned 18 at the time of their claims being processed. There are major differences in the rights of asylum seekers who are over or under 18 years of age. Many of the unaccompanied minors lacked documentation to prove their age. This prompted major debates in the country surrounding the identification of an asylum seeker's true age. The rate of approval of asylum for those under eighteen was was high. In 2017 it was 79% for this group. However, a large number of claimants were still waiting for a decision from the Swedish Migration Board - who had turned eighteen while waiting for a decision on their case. People in this situation were extremely upset since they were now at risk of being deported due to the slow handling of their claims by the migration authority.

Because of this dilemma, a unique law was created for this particular group. Some felt that the law was introduced out of fear of taking a decision to forcibly remove a large number of claimants – most of whom had only recently turned eighteen. What most politicians in Sweden are very afraid of is the stamp of racism or xenophobia. The new law was considered complicated for many to understand and adhere to. In short, the law grants a residence permit for those who applied for asylum by October 2015, when the application was under 18 years, but had to wait at least 15 months for notification.

For this group of refugees, support is provided for them to study at upper secondary level for thirteen months. The period of study may be extended by active studies on, for example, a vocational program. Participants receive benefits during the study period. Upon completion, participants have six months to find a permanent job, in which they do not need to receive welfare benefits. For those who manage this, permanent residency is granted.

Stockholm City is Sweden's largest municipality. Each year, about 20,000 immigrants study Swedish For Imigrants, (SFI). The SFI education is a free, voluntary education programme for anyone who has a residence permit in Sweden. Students are offered at least 15 hours a week, for about 1-6 years, depending on prior knowledge and study experience. They may be entitled to welfare benefits during the study period. The students who are considered to be far away from the labor market, those with little or no prior education, are included in what is labelled "compulsory education", which means that they have to study 30 hours a week for two years, in order to receive financial support.

In addition to language, this education often includes basic courses in mathematics, community orientation and health. Courses end at the corresponding level B1 in the European Language Reference Framework. If you then want to study further, or specialize in a subject, a vocational program for example, it is also free of charge. In the latter situation, although no welfare benefit can be claimed for this further study, student loans can be accessed.

The large number of immigrants arriving in 2015, of course, had a major impact on SFI education in Sweden. Primarily, it became very difficult to find competent teachers, and so the number of SFI students in the classes increased. However, the number did not increase significantly. For example, in Stockholm the increase in numbers entering SFI classes was around 5%. Moreover, all new-arrival students were able to start studying immediately. There were no waiting lists, queues or delays in accessing language education. As soon as a residence permit had been granted, the benefits and educational opportunities described above, could be accessed immediately.

However, problems did emerge in creating the sort of vocational education that could help students get into the job market as quickly as possible. Many who came in 2015 had very low levels of prior education, and thus required a lengthy period of education. Many Swedish vocational education programs that were available were at a relatively high level and required that the students had prior knowledge -equivalent to year 9 in Swedish primary school, which the students lacked. These were, for example, training for carpenters, nurses, chefs, etc. After 2015, therefore, an intense effort was made in Sweden to create vocational training suitable for those with little prior education so that they could get out into the labour market as soon as possible. Nevertheless, one group presented a particularly difficult challenge. It was the unaccompanied asylum seekers who had turned 18 and, according to the regulation, had received a limited time to study, and then needed good skills to then be able to get a job within six months of the education.

Several new projects have been started, with a lot of language support, a lot of teacher and mentoring support and a lot of practice. Those who came here unaccompanied have lived under difficult conditions for a long time, often before they came to Sweden, and have little experience of formal study. In a year, we will see if the educational programs have been successful in educating the group to reach the level they need to obtain the coveted residence permit.

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The scale of this problem has now become evident as almost four years have passed since their arrival and many of the unaccompanied youths of 2015 are due to finish their education. The teachers involved in the education of this group report feelings of anxiety, stress and deep concern. This is because if the students do not pass the studies, it is they who will be required to award the students a failed grade. In Stockholm, but also in many more municipalities across Sweden, teachers have been warning that the students do not have sufficient prior knowledge, especially in Swedish as a second language, to reach the educational standards required. Even if the teachers do their very best, the time is too short for the shortfall to be made up. Students who fail these final exams will lose the right to a residence permit and risk being expelled. Some believe that Sweden has deferred the decision of expulsion to the individual teachers. There is currently much debate about this situation across Sweden. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions is just one body of many that has been requesting more comprehensive guidance and support from central government with regard to these cases. Alarmingly, no one seems to be willing to take on the responsibility, and time is running short. These crucial, life-determining decisions are being left to the language teachers.

Helene Singer *lives in Sweden. Ever since she recieved her teachers certificate 18 years ago, she has chosen to focus her work on adult education, especially Swedish for immigrants. She has worked as a teacher for several years, tutoring newly arrived illiterate migrants, academics and unacocompanied refugee childern. For the last seven years she has worked as principal of the labour market administration Stockholm. Her ambition is to create as good an education programme as possible in order to give all new arrivals a strong platform for self-sufficiency.:* Helene.singer@stockholm.se

An overview of recent research with adult learners with limited literacy

By Jenny Field

In August of this year I attended the LESLLA conference in Pittsburgh, USA to show findings from a 2-year research project conducted in my hometown in New Zealand. Hamilton, a city of 178,000, receives regular intakes of former quota refugees through UNHCR. My research was with 60 of these learners who had limited or no print literacy in their L1. The participants came from Wintec, a tertiary educational institution, and a partner organisation, English Language Partners New Zealand, who provide tutoring in homes and ESOL Literacy classes for their 7000 learners.

The research investigated whether there were differences in rates of learning between two groups of adult former-refugee participants: refugees that had 0-2 years of prior education and those that had 8 plus years of prior education. An online digital assessment, developed by the Tertiary Education Commission New Zealand, tracks students' learning progress and was administered at the beginning and end of every programme. Learners' receptive/listening skills and recognition and selection of 30 familiar vocabulary items were captured over four sessions over 18 months. The results showed that those who had more years of prior learning learned at a slightly faster rate than those with little or no prior education.

What was more surprising was there was evidence of regression as well as gain over the four collections and that those with the least prior education had more regressions than those with 8+ years who had a slightly more consistent gain pattern.

This suggests that learners with little or no prior education need much more time to acquire the stepping stones of L2 learning than their peers with somewhat more background education. The pre-interviews, conducted with an interpreter from their first language, yielded other reasons why progress may take time. Of the sixty learners interviewed, just under half of them mentioned factors that were a constraint to their learning: learning; their health, anxiety about family members remaining in their country of origin and sickness among their immediate family members.

I also conducted classroom observations trying to find out what strategies learners were using to learn. I visited four classes, most of which had trained bilingual assistants working at least two of the four days of the week. These tutors assist the lead tutor clarifying instructions and key vocabulary, if required.

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I was impressed with how well the learners cooperated and supported each other. Generally, those from similar language groups sat together and assisted each other. Surprisingly, quite a few learners in the slightly more advanced classes had access to a mobile phone and listened to the pronunciation of unfamiliar words. Repetition seemed to be a major strategy too, as well as copying of some words or phrases. I noticed that after copying they would read the words quietly to themselves.

However, my impressions and also my data, show that assistance from the bilingual assistants was the most helpful strategy for learners in the lower classes. This was verified in the post interviews held after the two-year study. As the learners reflected on their progress over the two years, most of them valued the bilingual assistants. This familiar language supported the learners both culturally and linguistically creating a Zone of Proximal Development (Daniels, Cole, & Wertsch, 2007, p. 278) enabling learning of the new language to occur. Having a support person from their own language seems particularly helpful for non-print adult learners when they begin the long journey of L2 acquisition in a foreign, largely print-literate country. This support person may be a trained assistant, or could be another learner in the group with a better understanding of the L2.

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One Dari speaker reported:

"For two days every week we had an interpreter. They just helped me to understand some new things. The two days that the assistant was there, I understood a lot more."

Having taken into account various strategies used by these adult emerging bilingual learners and having acknowledged that their everyday lives can be complex and that progress take considerably longer than with literate adult language learners, I will tentatively suggest some hints for teachers working with learners without print literacy. These learners, who often have some oral abilities in L2, have distinct needs which require an approach that meets those needs.

A negotiated syllabus is useful in that the learners can guide its construction and perhaps take ownership. Having pleasurable and varied learning experiences based on their real lives now, or if appropriate on their former known lives/skills, will yield new language which can be explained readily in the learners' L1 or through discussions in L2. The learnings can be shared, drawn or written down in the L2 to become a permanent expression of the experience. Gradually, attention can be drawn to some print protocols in these artefacts e.g. a capital letter for a person's name or for a city. This teaching strategy is a variation on the noticing approach, involving understanding of a rule or a pattern (Schmidt, 1993, p. 26). As these experiences develop, letter-sound connections will gradually be introduced,

although I would limit formal teaching of these initially.

This informal oral-based programme where all experiences are shared ones and all learnings are celebrated, should over time build a readiness for a more structured approach. It seems that three aspects of adult learning develop simultaneously: understanding of some of the protocols of print literacy, some phonemic awareness and finally study skills and awareness of class and group learning. Some suggestions for these experiences are walks, cooking, gardening, a bus ride, skills sharing or visits.

I tentatively suggest that this kind of dialogic approach (Alexander, 2008) can excite new L2 adult learners as they experience success in discovering aspects about the new language. These shared experiences may help to build a rapport between learners and teachers, reducing the social distance between them and enticing the learners to start to engage in the L2 literacy learning process.

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Jenny Field *(M. Phil), is a senior class teacher at Waikato Institute of Technology in New Zealand. She has taught in New Zealand and for brief periods in Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea. Jenny is interested in second language learning with beginner learners and particularly those that have had a sparse or interrupted early education. She has had considerable experience teaching adults from former refugee and migrant backgrounds in both community and institutional settings.*

ESOL: Lessons learnt in the first year of teaching

By Gillian Moore

The first year of teaching, we can all agree, is extremely challenging for all teachers for a number of reasons. Teaching ESOL can be particularly demanding because our students come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures with an equally diverse range of social, emotional and educational needs. Secondly, teachers of ESOL come from a wide range of backgrounds and many did not start out as ESOL practitioners, and I was no different. In my case, I taught in a TEFL context abroad, worked as a TA in an Autistic Spectrum Base for adolescents and then gained a PGCE in General Education. I was, perhaps luckier than most in that my teaching practice was gained in an ESOL department under the mentorship of ESOL professionals. I know this is not the case for many, nonetheless, brilliant ESOL teachers. However, the PGCE and my previous experience teaching English was not enough, to prepare me for the first year of teaching. Therefore, I would like to share my experiences in the hope that it might help smooth that first-year transition for new ESOL teachers and give food for thought for the more experienced among us.

´Experience is the best teacher´

This is the kind of quote that a majority would rightly nod their heads to regardless of the profession but, apart from advising patience, what good is it to the inexperienced? My first year teaching ESOL presented some fairly steep learning curves, (think Olympic ski jump and you'd have the gist). It's also true however, that making that safe landing together with my students was a cause to celebrate and a great source of professional and personal satisfaction. Coming into ESOL freshly from a PGCE is somewhat traumatic because you are cognizant that ´the cord has been cut´ and that ‘YOU'RE ON!’ It becomes clear the course was simply an introductory course. Ouch! The reality of a full-time teaching schedule sets in. Time and energy have now become a well-pronounced scarcity. You may find yourself working over multiple sites, having no fixed office space, struggling with a heavy timetable and only catching fleeting moments with colleagues. Managers may be as helpful and available as they can and the students lovely, but the task at hand is more than challenging and the environment often lonely. And the biggest concern with all of this? How am I going to be the best teacher I can be and how can I continue to improve?

Feedback is mutual

Regarding the last point, don't panic. You will continue to grow. However, rather than a tutor or mentor, you can identify areas for your own growth, and you will, eventually. Also, the source of feedback will change. I discovered (cue "drumroll") that feedback is, or can be, mutual. Your students can guide your development as much as you do theirs. Ask them what they liked about the lesson and what they didn't. You can even do thumbs up or thumbs down. More or less? Teach the words 'enjoy' and 'useful'. Heck, if it's possible, and you are robust enough, create a suggestion box for higher levels. Of course, if a Pre-Entry student, excited to be writing for the first time requests a 'how to' on writing formal letters, you may need to ever so-gently, adjust student expectations.

Are you not entertained?

Learning should be fun! Another quote that has slipped into the mainstream, but should it be fun? How can you guarantee it? Now it's time to manage angsty new teacher expectations. We are not entertainers. As much as I want my students to enjoy lessons, (and 'enjoy' is a more realistic word when applied to adult learners), there will be times and situations where that simply won't happen - and it shouldn't affect your confidence. Sometimes you'll be tired and they'll be tired. Things happen, lives are complicated for everyone and particularly for our students.

I'm not saying that your energy has in class. On the contrary, I found tha needed me to confidently encourage them to lower the energy when required. Additionally, knowing a student enjoyed a class may not equate to the same pay-off in terms of learning, but I do believe it can help them feel more enthusiastic about learning English or attending class. I've discovered that if I'm enjoying, usually they are, and if there are students who seem unhappy or disengaged, don´t be afraid to check in with them. The ESOL classroom, as we know, can be a true life-line for our learners and, a source of pride and pleasure for us.

The only teaching resource

The subject of resources in ESOL is a fairly complex area and warrants its own discussion but, essentially, this is what I discovered; resources suitable for a TEFL context may not be so for ESOL. There is a distinct lack of ESOL-specific material and you will have to spend time creating, searching for and adapting resources (particularly for lower-level groups). Help can be found in the department library, in an existing departmental database or in staff resource sharing groups. For me, the largest deficit when creating or using resources was a lack of knowledge regarding my students' life experiences and their current needs. To give an example, I used a coursebook to teach the past tense through the themes of holidays or travelling. The experiences that students discussed did not match the relaxed beach

scenes in the book. Some mentioned crossing the Mediterranean in an over-crowded boat or fleeing their country by whatever means, there was obviously a large gap in my understanding. I learned to listen better. For example, If Maryam hands you the phone with her child's school on the other end, consider a lesson surrounding childcare or school. If Zafur says, ´Teacher, man next house, very good, Welsh', then hone in on that and give a lesson on small talk. I have learnt that ESOL is different to TEFL in that the need for English is needs-based and often with an urgent need to communicate. Having a chance to communicate freely with students (even while using mobile phones as a helping aid) has been very useful in learning about their lives, their difficulties and their joys. This all helps in creating and presenting engaging and useful learning material.

Comradery and guidance

Teaching can be lonely. You can foster meaningful and positive teacher-student relationships, but for many, especially new teachers, this can not replace the support and guidance of your professional peers. I was lucky to find this among a sorority of more experienced teachers that gave me their insights and perspectives on dilemmas I faced in and out of the classroom. Their time and kindness was invaluable in that first year. Given that, I would recommend identifying and seeking out staff who might be supportive. Most experienced teachers will be happy to give advice and help a new teacher. Make time to check-in with managers or pop your head around the door to say hello. More formally, you can ask for a mentor. There will usually be someone willing to help. Mutual observations by mentors are also an excellent option.

´Experience is not the best teacher, other people's experience is the best teacher.´

As important as being proactive and reflective is, having not yet developed that bank of teaching experience, students' experiences and collective professional experience can be more useful in helping new teachers than personal reflection alone. Therefore, owning and then sharing those experiences amongst colleagues is even more important. Having said all of this, during that first year, I might still have appreciated a well-timed 'take it easy' or 'relax', or perhaps, just a little of that 'patience' I reluctantly mentioned at the start.

I welcome dialogue and your feedback.

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Concentric Circles

Here is one example of an excellent, student centred activity: It requires very little preparation from the teacher and ensures a lot of one-to-one talking time for each student. Importantly, it can be adapted to any level and age group.

Procedure
Get students to think of as many questions as they can around a theme / topic. E.g. hobbies, jobs, future plans, books, music, family etc. For example, for the theme of hobbies, a pre-intermediate level class might come up with questions such as:

What is your hobby?
How often do you do it?
Where do you do it?
How much does it cost?
Why do enjoy it?
How long have you been doing it? Etc.

The teacher then writes these on the board, discussing any language issues / difficulties as they arise.

Following this, invite students to the middle of the class and arrange them in two circles, an inside and outside, the inside facing out. Alternatively, they may be placed in two rows – with a gap between each set of opposite chairs. Pairs should be given a time limit to ask and answer all the questions with their partner, say 3 mins.

When the time is up, the students in the outside circle or from one row, move to their right and ask and answer the same questions - but with their new partner. After a couple of changes, the questions might be removed from the board in order to make the task a little more demanding.

After the students have spoken to all partners, the teacher may wish to challenge the students to write up the questions again on the board – once more dealing with any inaccuracies / difficulties etc. as they arise.

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