

## Whose Integration?

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What does the term 'integration' mean to adult ESOL learners? What facilitates their sense of belonging in the UK? What are the barriers they face? What are their opinions about anti-migrant policy and rhetoric? The '*Whose Integration*' project explored these questions over a period of five weeks in two ESOL classes, using a participatory approach.

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## Abstract

What does the term 'integration' mean to adult ESOL learners? What facilitates their sense of belonging in the UK? What are the barriers they face? What are their opinions about anti-migrant policy and rhetoric? The '*Whose Integration*' project explored these questions over a period of five weeks in two ESOL classes, using a participatory approach. This report shows that students found 'integration' a difficult term to define, but nevertheless a pertinent one. They expressed anxiety about ways of belonging to their local communities and about how to position themselves in relation to religious, gender, economic and ethnic categories. It also shows that migrants face material barriers to integration such as racism, poverty and immigration status. The classroom data suggested that 'integration' is not a fixed state which people attain or fail to attain, but is instead a dynamic process. In the classroom, students and teachers alike were involved in the *act* of integrating, dealing with difference, dissent and commonality within and across ethnic groups. Students and teachers displayed multiple identities and allegiances which were national, local, gender based and religious, not all of which were equally salient at all times. Participatory ESOL classes offered a challenging, but safe environment for critical debate and discussion, which in turn, fostered the development of language beyond students' designated levels. The report concludes that integration is not a one-way street, or even a two-way street between migrant and 'host' community but is as complex and multi-directional as a 'Spaghetti Junction'.



## Section one: Introduction

The project *Whose Integration?* had two main aims: firstly, to explore what integration meant to students in two ESOL classes in London, and secondly, to examine the potential of ‘participatory ESOL’. This is an approach to teaching English language and literacy that draws out and builds upon the experiences of students and develops a shared critical understanding of the world. As ESOL teachers who have been working with participatory methods for some time, we wished to explore their usefulness for addressing complex topics such as integration in the classroom. We were interested in integration because it has been a key concept in recent public debates about immigration, multiculturalism and English language learning – debates which directly affect ESOL students, but about which they are not often asked to give their opinions. This report shows how two ESOL courses unfolded from week to week and in it we discuss how themes emerged and developed, how meaning was made collectively through dialogue and debate, and how the pedagogy worked. We begin with a brief discussion about the term ‘integration’.

### Defining integration

‘Integration’ is an example of what Raymond Williams (1976:83) called a ‘keyword’: a socially prominent, significant term which can mean different things to different people at different times, and which is contested in public and political debate. The term ‘integration’ is frequently linked to other complex terms such as ‘cohesion’, ‘belonging’, ‘diversity’ and ‘citizenship’. Therefore, from the beginning integration was a difficult term to define and a difficult concept to discuss.

Despite this, we wished to explore the term with ESOL students because for over a decade there have been fierce debates about the integration of ethnic and linguistic minority people. This interest has been driven by high levels of diversity – or what the sociologist Steven Vertovec (2006) calls ‘superdiversity’ – in British towns and cities created by the processes of migration and globalization. For some people this is a cause for celebration and for others it is just a fact of life. For some, though, the debate is framed in more negative, or alarmist terms. For examples, some commentators have said that the UK is ‘too diverse’ (Goodhart 2004) or that multiculturalism has led to people in some parts of the country living parallel lives (Home Office 2001). The debate has been heightened at times by reactions to happenings such as ‘9/11’, the 2005 London bombings and the events in Woolwich in May 2013; Muslims in particular have been the focus of much negative attention in the media and in political discourse. Politicians of all persuasions have made integration and cohesion central to their policies and rhetoric, and on many occasions have laid the blame for a



perceived lack of cohesion at the feet of migrants, in particular the perception that migrants fail to learn English well enough to integrate (see e.g. Blackledge 2009 for a critical discussion). As we show in Section two, Part three, some go further and say that migrants are *unwilling* to learn English and integrate, although as teachers who have worked for many years with migrant communities we would question this.

### Research on integration

Research on integration can be divided into several types. Some studies are statistical and try to measure, for example, levels of employment or intermarriage between ethnic minority people and the 'host' population (see, for example, [www.mipex.eu](http://www.mipex.eu)). There is also a growing body of qualitative and ethnographic research about migrants' real lives which explores topics such as belonging (e.g. Hamaz and Vasta 2009), notions of community (e.g. Wessendorf 2011) and local perceptions of social cohesion (Saggar et al 2012). This research can act as an antidote to inaccurate and discriminatory top-down discourses and policies about minority communities and individuals. Finally, there is a large body of academic work which consists of critiques of political, public and media discourses and policies about integration (e.g. Horner and Weber 2011).

Much research based on interviews, focus groups and surveys provides only a snapshot of integration which does not capture the nature of integration as a *process*. We suggest that our project captured a more dynamic picture of people 'in the act' of integrating with each other and with us. Also, migrant voices are not often heard being critical or analytical about the debates which directly refer to them. The *Whose Integration?* project aimed to explore the meaning of the term from the perspective of students and to deliberate with them about what the concept means to them in their everyday lives. Debates arising in this project centred on issues such as: What is it like to live in London and bring up British children while keeping up connections to your country of origin? How can you hold allegiances to more than one place, or carry on traditions and customs from elsewhere, while at the same time fitting into a new environment? What are the barriers to integration and what things help? How does the migration experience differ in the UK to other countries? Is the situation changing? What exactly are we integrating into? Is this a two-way street? How do people's experiences fit with the powerful discourses of integration and the current suggestion amongst politicians that 'multiculturalism has failed'?



## Participatory pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

In this section we provide a brief explanation of the origins of participatory ESOL. The underlying theory behind participatory pedagogy was developed by the Brazilian Marxist educator, Paulo Freire, and adapted to contexts outside Latin America by educators such as Elsa Auerbach, Henry Giroux, Ira Shor and Peter McLaren. In his 1971 text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire theorised a bottom-up approach to education which opposed what he called a 'banking' model of education, in which the teacher deposits a predetermined body of knowledge in the mind of the learner. Instead, Freire advocated the use of dialogic methods which draw out and build upon the experiences of students to develop a shared critical understanding of language and the world.

The approach used in this project, participatory ESOL, has adapted various techniques, tools and ideas from this Freirean tradition, along with other pedagogic approaches and applied it to the teaching of ESOL. For example, in order to draw out the knowledge of students and to facilitate meaningful dialogue, we might use a code, such as a picture showing an issue that is important to the group (the use of codes is discussed further in Section two, Part two). The code can then be decodified (understood and analysed) by using 'problem-posing', a technique which helps a group to arrive at a deeper understanding of an issue. Other techniques include visual tools, many of which were developed by Reflect ESOL during a four-year project at the organisation ActionAid ([www.reflect-action.org/reflectesol](http://www.reflect-action.org/reflectesol)). Finally, as trained ESOL teachers, we use techniques for teaching language and literacy such as Language Experience, process and group writing, tasks which focus on linguistic form and games and other activities which foster a safe inclusive learning environment.

## The two classes and the research design

We explored the question, 'what is integration?' with two different groups of ESOL learners over a period of five weeks. One group was a Level 1 ESOL class at Tower Hamlets College, London (THC). The class was mostly from Bangladesh and Somalia, the majority were women, most were not in paid employment and most had been in the UK for at least five years. The second class took place in Greenwich, London and was organised by a third sector ESOL provider, EFA London (English for Action)<sup>2</sup>. The Greenwich class had a greater range of nationalities, first languages and levels (Entry Level 2 to level 1) and as there were no immigration status requirements to join the class there was a greater range of statuses.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about participatory pedagogy and training email [info@efalondon.org](mailto:info@efalondon.org)

<sup>2</sup> For more information about English for Action go to [www.efalondon.org](http://www.efalondon.org)

We planned for the first class using a single plan for both groups but subsequent lessons were planned separately because different issues arose for each set of students. We followed up each lesson with a reflective meeting in which we planned for the following week. In this way the planning was responsive to language, group dynamics and themes that had emerged in the lesson. We intentionally did not use a pre-planned scheme of work and did not pre-empt what might emerge from week to week. There was, however, a process which encouraged the discussions to become progressively more analytical; this is described in Section two. Similarly, we had no predefined language objectives or ‘target language’ and avoided introducing totally new linguistic structures and concepts. Instead, we worked with language as it emerged in order to build on and develop the students’ existing language skills. This is described more fully in Section three.

The main teachers on *Whose Integration?* were Dermot Bryers (DB) and Becky Winstanley (BW). They co-planned and taught all the classes while Melanie Cooke (MC) contributed to the planning and did some teaching in five of the sessions. The data collected consisted of the lesson plans and audio-recordings of ten 2.5 hour classes, teachers’ observation notes, students’ work, photos, teachers’ post-lesson reflections and postings by students and teachers on the blog created for the project<sup>3</sup>. The data was interpreted by all three of us in an iterative process which involved listening several times to the classroom recordings and pulling out themes which we discussed and refined on two ‘analysis days’.

This report presents some of the key points and observations emerging from the project. Section two forms the main part of the report and describes how the project unfolded over five weeks. We track how students talked about integration and how their thinking and language developed. This is reflected in the sub-headings we use in Section two: ‘Making Meaning’, ‘Going Deeper’ and ‘Broadening Out’. In Section three we turn to a discussion about participatory ESOL and its usefulness for working with ESOL students on complex and ‘difficult’ topics. We conclude, in Section four, with a summary of the main points we wish to highlight about the project as a whole. Throughout the text we have placed a series of ‘Tool Boxes’ that give information about how the techniques we used during the project are actually set up and put into practice in the classroom. They are not intended to be a ‘how to’ guide as such but we hope they will give an idea of how participatory ESOL works in practice. The techniques and approaches will be accessible to those already experienced in participatory methods but we hope will be of use to all ESOL practitioners.

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<sup>3</sup> This can be accessed at <http://britishcouncilresearch.wordpress.com>.

## Section two: Whose Integration? The course

In Section two we describe and interpret the students' discussions about integration and related themes. We have divided the discussions we had over the five-week course into three parts: 'Making Meaning', 'Going Deeper' and 'Broadening Out'.

### Part One: Making meaning

In the first session we began our exploration of the topic. We believed that it was important for the project to be rooted in the ideas and knowledge of students and we were careful in the first session to avoid pre-empting or influencing their thoughts and opinions. In order to keep the discussion as open as possible we chose two open-ended participatory tools, the picture pack (see Tool Box 1) and the card cluster (see Tool Box 2).

#### Tool Box 1: Picture pack

The picture pack is a large collection of photos of different things which are spread out on a surface for students to rifle through. The images trigger associations for students which provide the basis for discussions. The instruction may be '*choose a photo that says something about you and tell the class why you have chosen it*'. In our case, the instruction was '*choose a photo that says something about integration*.' The picture pack allows students to describe their own experiences. This can be personal or detached, literal or metaphorical, as they wish.

#### Tool Box 2: Card cluster

The card cluster is a way for a class to pool knowledge and create a group narrative about a topic. Each student is given three pieces of card and told to write three different things about the topic, in this case integration. It can be information, opinion or personal experience and there are no rights or wrongs. The cards are then collected and clustered collaboratively into themes. Finally, when the cards have been clustered, students take turns to create a single narrative, or summary of the statements. This produces a wealth of language and opportunities for further language development work, as well as themes for further exploration.

### Emerging themes

As we signaled in the introduction, the term ‘integration’ is a difficult one to define and this became clear to us from day one. The picture pack produced anecdotes about shopping, challenging racism and everyday encounters and served to produce a lot of talk and to bond the group. The results of the card cluster were much more directly focused on integration and produced information about emerging themes. The statements made by the students at Tower Hamlets, for example, were clustered into the following themes<sup>4</sup>:

<b>Religious practices</b>
What about your religion? Do you need to think before you done something?
In the UK, I see something that is unique. Freedom for culture and practising religion
In my country every religion can perform their religious activity peacefully.
<b>Sharing cultures</b>
Wish to improve your knowledge.
Decision to find new things.
Culture is a big issue for integration.
Push yourself go out and meet other country of people or other culture.
To learn other community culture and respect
<b>Community Opinions</b>
In Britain, the politicians and media became obsessed with integration after the July 2005 bombings.
What is community think about us?
Differences of living lifestyle is a big issue integration.
<b>Language</b>
Language is the main factor in this country.
Accent is the main theme of integration

<sup>4</sup> Here, and throughout the text, students’ spoken and written language has been reproduced verbatim.

Language is the big problem.
Language is very important because integration.
Learning English is the main or most important thing take part integration.
<b>Help and Support</b>
Responsibility
Trust: trusting is more important to everyone.
When I see some accident I feel bad-empathy is important for integration.
Helping each other
What we have achieved. We need share and respect. Work together
Express yourself and support sensitively each other.
<b>Equality and freedom</b>
Equality for everyone
For everyone same rule in Germany.
Equal opportunity for everyone.
Immigration status is a barrier and it's very difficult for immigrant to get citizenship in the UK.
If you don't have legal documents it can be very difficult both practically and psychologically.
In Saudi Arabia, women can't go out without cover their face.
In France you can't wear a headscarf in public place.
<b>Facilities and welfare</b>
ESOL classes are key to integration but the government is cutting welfare.
Education fee increase. Many people got depressed.
If you have money it's easier to integrate.
What facility we need.

Like the term ‘integration’ itself, these statements are very broad. They include both barriers to integration (e.g. immigration status) and things which might facilitate it (empathy, sharing, respect). They also include areas associated with the integration of migrants such as managing differences in religion, ‘culture’ and language, as well as issues which affect everyone (i.e. spending cuts) but which affect migrants in particular ways. In addition to these themes, the class discussion produced others which would be the focus in subsequent weeks, albeit with different emphases and focuses in the two groups. The most salient of these were: racism, exploitation, immigration status, national identity, gender, friendship, parenting, schools and conflict. We have grouped the main discussions from the first phase of the project, ‘Making Meaning’, into two headings: ‘safetalk’ (Chick;1996)<sup>5</sup> and ‘barriers to integration’.

### ‘Safetalk’

The first session in Greenwich began with students talking about food and the contribution it has made to integration of migrant communities in the UK and the role it has played in people feeling valued and accepted in this country. The theme of food also led to themes of identity and nostalgia and the beginnings of a collective ‘grappling’ about the definition of the word culture –a term which, like integration, is complex and contested. At this point in the course, the students perceived integration in London as a process of learning about a whole range of cultures. As one student from Spain said, during the picture pack activity:

*‘I like very much this picture because for me since I came to England I have discovered lots of different foods which I never try in Spain because we don’t have this kind of immigration.’*

In the first session, most students recounted mainly anecdotal experiences, without going into much depth. As we show later, though, as the sessions progressed, they were characterized by serious debates and discussions which were critical, sometimes uncomfortable and much more profound.

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<sup>5</sup> Chick used the term to describe pedagogic practices which conceal the fact that pupils are not learning much of value in their classrooms. We are using the term in a different way, i.e. to describe how people protect themselves in discussions which might be difficult or painful.

## Barriers to integration?

### Racism

The theme of racism emerged almost immediately, with discussions about the meaning of the terms 'racism', 'prejudice' and 'stereotyping'. In the Greenwich class, students provided powerful descriptions of personal experiences of racism. One student told of her mum, who frequently has the bus door closed in her face because of her hijab. Another spoke of physically ejecting a woman from a bus after being racially abused. It seemed significant to us that one of the first themes to emerge from the topic of integration was racism, an obvious barrier to integration felt keenly by some of the students. Racism is a very difficult topic to discuss, though, and it was noticeable that students wished to avoid pointing the finger of blame at the UK in particular; some students dealt with this by resorting to platitudes such as: 'every country, they have racism', or 'this country you have a lot of things to share, good integration'. As we show in Section three, however, this 'safetalk' gradually gave way in later weeks to a more searching, analytical approach to difficult themes, including that of racism.

### Language Focus: The ESOL class as a 'community of practice'

In participatory ESOL 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. A very important thing to emerge at this early stage was the beginnings of a shared lexicon. We collected a series of project specific meanings which all participants used and reused during the five sessions. In week 1 the phrase 'leave at the door', came up in relation to culture and religion and what you can and can't talk about in different situations. In the second week the phrase 'she's gone modern' emerged to describe how conservative elders in Bangladesh refer to women who adopt practices regarded as modern, such as cycling. 'Gone modern' became a phrase that was recycled throughout the course and entered the teachers' lexicon. From Greenwich we got the term 'open gates' to refer to the opposite of barriers to integration. Recycling this language seemed to reinforce the bond of the group as we were developing our own speech community. It sent the message that students could also be creative and innovative with language and that the teachers could learn language from the students. The new phrases were also brought to and from the two classes via the blog and the teachers and created a form of dialogue between the groups.

### Money and social class

Another of the themes that developed early on while discussing barriers to integration was money and social class. In week one, students identified the market (in its economic sense) as a major factor in integration: 'if you have money, you can integrate' said one student. At THC, money and economic wellbeing was seen to be a key element of integration. The students linked it to personal and social confidence: 'if you have money you won't be shy to communicate'. Another student added that not worrying about money permitted people to participate fully in an ESOL class. There was, however, no consensus around the question of money and class. At Greenwich, for example, some students expressed the opinion that in the UK the legal system treats everyone equally regardless of class and wealth and said that if someone arrived in the country with a sackful of money from ill-gotten gains they would not be welcomed with open arms!

### Culture

The complex topic of 'culture' came up in weeks one and two and subsequently throughout the course. Discussions emerged about differences between the UK and other countries and how migrants should go about settling into a new society. One of the areas in which 'culture' became relevant was the theme of parenting and there was a lot of anxiety about anti-social behaviour amongst young people. One student, for example, claimed that drug taking is not a problem in Bangladesh and questioned why it was happening amongst some of their children in the UK. Some people felt their culture was challenged by migrating to a different society, particularly when they had to decide how to educate their children. Someone suggested that the broader 'community' cannot play the same role in child-raising in migrant communities as it does at home. Several students said, however, that they were not blaming the UK for these problems and it is parents who carry the weight of responsibility for their children. One student in Greenwich revealed that part of her motivation for mixing with other parents at her children's primary school was to find suitable friends for her daughters. She was looking for parents with similar 'values', 'manners' and attitudes towards education. She said that she was judged to be a 'pushy parent' and admitted that she was also judging people in regard to how they bring up their children.

At the beginning, students tended to be somewhat prescriptive in their views on integration using language such as 'you have to' and 'you must'. At first it seemed that students were repeating uncritical views about integration being the sole responsibility of the person who

migrates, such as those we discuss in Section two, Part three. One student, for example, said that to integrate ‘you have to copy English people’. By this he was suggesting that learners of English need to pronounce the language exactly like native speakers in order to be accepted. Another student suggested that there was an obligation on migrants to share their ‘good culture’ with other people as a way of breaking down barriers. As we have pointed out, however, in later sessions students started to explore some of the complexities of the term integration and to question simplistic notions such as it being a ‘one-way street’ (see Section two, Part three).

### **Language focus: Negotiating meaning**

The meaning of new lexis was often negotiated with the class and not provided by the teachers. Teaching often focused on connotation of words rather than phonology or collocation. One example of this was when we corrected the use of ‘migration people’ and suggested ‘migrant’. The word was compared with ‘immigrant’ and teachers focused on the different connotations, suggesting that immigrant was often used in a more pejorative sense and that you would be likely to read the word in the right-wing press. The teachers revealed that they always tended to use ‘migrant’ rather than ‘immigrant’ and indeed, one or two of the students had already picked up this difference. In another discussion about the difference between ‘prejudice’ and ‘stereotype’, we all put forward a working definition. In contrast to the teachers’ attempts, the student’s definition was by far the most useful and accurate. She explained, ‘stereotype comes from outside. Prejudice comes from inside. You use stereotype to example your prejudice.’

## Part Two: Going Deeper

By weeks three and four we had moved into our second stage. We began to explore some of the emerging issues in greater depth using group discussion, problem-posing (see Tool Box 3) and the iceberg tool (see Tool Box 4).

### Tool Box 3: Problem-posing with a code

This tool works by focusing the group on a picture or code and using a structured questioning technique to draw out understanding and reactions from the group. The picture here is an example of a code we used in week three and which we discuss below. The questions are graded and stimulate a deepening analysis of the code. The questions are posed by the facilitator and the discussion takes place among the group of participants. The technique works by edging the discussion deeper and deeper in a systematic way rather than a free for all open discussion. Auerbach (1992) suggests five stages:

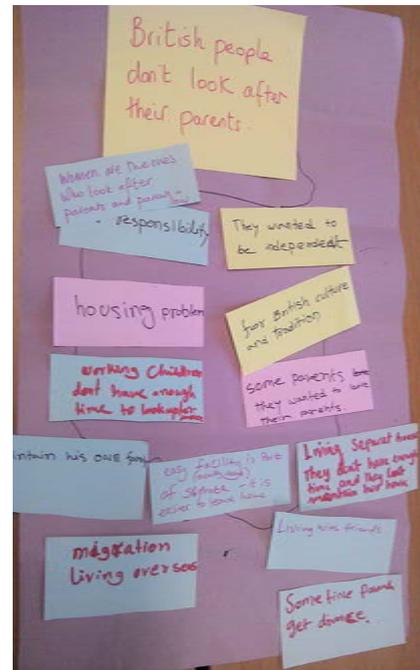
1. Describe the content - what do you see?
2. Define the problem
3. Personalize the problem
4. Discuss the problem
5. Discuss the alternatives of the problem



### Tool Box 4: The Iceberg

The iceberg tool is used to explore the underlying causes of an issue that is often understood at a surface level. An iceberg is drawn with a small part exposed above the level of the sea and the large part going down beneath the sea's surface.

Students engage in group discussion and try to fill the space below the water line with possible explanations for the theme on the tip of the iceberg. The tool encourages us not to just take things at face value but to explore all the possible circumstances and permeations. This often allows for a deeper understanding of things outside our own experiences and therefore a more complex and real understanding of others' lives.



By this stage, the word integration was barely mentioned. Instead, the topics explored were related to 'community' and 'culture' and in particular to questions of gender inequality and gender relations. The discussions, which centered mainly on cultural stereotypes and assumptions, were analytical and inquiring and moved beyond the mere replication of the mainstream views and 'safetalk' we saw in weeks one and two.

### She's Gone Modern: discussions about gender

One of the discussions in Tower Hamlets centered on the notion that 'Muslim women don't ride bikes' which students had brought up in the 'Making Meaning' stage when there had been an animated discussion about women riding bikes and the idea that a Bangladeshi woman who does so has 'gone modern'. Although this was not a topic we predicted, we realised that students wished to explore it further. We decided to use 'gone modern' as a generative phrase, a technique developed by Freire and applied to ESOL by Elsa Auerbach (1992). We codified the issue in the form of a picture and then used Freirean problem-posing to explore it (see Tool Box 3). The code shows a Muslim woman riding a bicycle past some male community leaders who appear to be judging her negatively. The questioning was done in the systematic way shown in Tool Box 3, and led to an hour long collective exploration and negotiation of ideas.

The process produced a debate about double standards, community and family pressures, fear of change and restricted personal freedom. One of the striking features of the discussion was the way in which students developed their ideas from a simple stance of ‘this is how it is done in our culture’ to a more questioning, even resistant position. For example, one male student said in response to the picture: ‘if my wife rides a bike, the men in my culture they don’t accept it, my father, my brother, my uncle.’ This was challenged by a female student, who objected: ‘but you say the same about your wife!’ He then thought some more about his position and explained ‘if you live in joint family then people say, “it’s not right, it’s not good.”’ Later in the debate, after several probes and explorations, the same student seemed to shift his point of view and commented: ‘...in real life maybe you can’t ride a bike as a Muslim woman, but what we are saying here is ‘why not’?’ The students in this debate were able to listen to each other’s points of view, to explore underlying reasons for particular opinions and to consider alternatives.

The discussion led on to one of the fundamental issues in the question of integration: the changes and adaptations which people undergo when they migrate to a new country. We discussed how social change occurs and why: is it gradual and inevitable or does it need strong people to act as catalysts? Students pointed to things which were problematic some time ago, but are now accepted as the norm. For example, one student argued that ‘five years ago no one came to ESOL classes’ because of resistance, particularly to women attending, from conservative members of the community. Now, she claimed, partly due to changes in the immigration process, that resistance has broken down and a lot more people attend ESOL classes. Some students discussed the need for people to resist practices and ideas they opposed and to get the strength to do so by joining with others: there were some creative ideas around taking action and changing people’s minds by exposing them to new experiences: we all liked the idea of a ‘mass hijab-wearing Boris bikeride’<sup>6</sup>!

Another important feature of this debate was that it created natural alliances between all the women in the room, including the teachers, who felt that they had no choice but to carry out domestic work such as housework, caring and childcare. These alliances crossed religious and cultural boundaries as well as teacher-student roles and put the spotlight on gender above all other social categories; the teachers perceived a feeling of connection and solidarity between the women in the room. One of the female students challenged DB on whether he shared the domestic work, her underlying question being ‘do you practise what

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to the public bicycle rental scheme in London. The bicycles are popularly known as ‘Boris bikes’ after Boris Johnson, Mayor of London.

you preach?’ The discussion showed that the participatory ESOL class can be regarded as an important ‘site’ of integration, especially if integration means deeper understanding of ‘the other’ and an acceptance that the concept of ‘the other’ is fluid, not static. Discussions such as the one we describe here suggest that focusing primarily on identities other than the ethnic, national or religious can foster alliances based on categories such as gender, family and class which may at times be more relevant. We came to see integration in this session, not as a *state* a person has reached or failed to reach, but as a *process* of fleeting and constantly shifting alliances, which we were involved in as much as the students.

Another tool we used to encourage critical discussions was the iceberg (see Tool Box 4). We used this tool in two ways: to illustrate the previous discussion and to explore another issue. After the bicycle discussion we used the iceberg to make a visual representation of the debate. At the tip of the iceberg was the issue (a woman ‘going modern’) and under the surface were underlying questions. We illustrated how the group had delved into their thoughts and ideas to arrive at deeper meanings. Using the iceberg made the structure and purpose of the speaking activity explicit to students, especially to those who might have been worried that the discussion had been a kind of ‘free for all’. We then moved on to use the iceberg as a thinking tool for another discussion in which the surface issue was ‘British people don’t look after the elderly’, another theme brought up by students in a previous session. Again, students delved under the surface of this statement to arrive at a deeper understanding, questioning the role of women as carers, the nature of work and the changing family.

We observed that students continued to reflect on the issues arising from this lesson long after it had finished; for example, a female student at THC said she had continued talking about ‘she’s gone modern’ with her friends later that day and over the weekend. Another posted this comment on the blog after week three:

*‘Yesterday we enjoyed our class. We find massive information from bicycle woman code. We had lots of conversation about it. Some of us said, the woman trying to ride bicycle, some of the religious men trying to stop her. We also did iceberg picture, we found out why British people not look after their parents. We think, they live in separate house also they work full time, so they don’t have enough time to look after their parents.’*

The debates initiated by the code and the iceberg were valuable for various reasons but especially because students were encouraged to develop their analytic thinking skills as well

as the high level language skills that accompany these. We discuss this in more detail in Section three.

### **Integrating into British culture**

At Greenwich we discussed what it means to try to integrate into ‘British culture’. Although it was clear from the start that students were unable to pinpoint an actual thing called ‘British culture’, and most people appreciated London as a multicultural city, several students did talk about feeling isolated and unsure about how to behave at a local level. One student said that at her children’s primary school she hadn’t made any friends and just picked up and dropped off her child without lingering to talk to other mums. Another student shared an example of her uncertainty about local norms. She explained that in Turkey it is seen to be rude to speak in the street, instead of inviting the person to your house for coffee. This student was worried that her reluctance to speak at length in the street, or the playground, would be interpreted as coldness. However, when she attended an event at her local children’s centre a woman from Turkey told her: ‘you know here in London, you’re not obliged to invite people to your house’. For this student, her lack of awareness of local ways acted as a barrier to integration in an important site, the school playground. For us, this pointed to an important point about integration: it might be impossible to define a national culture as such but migrants are still faced with learning how to integrate into the local community and its particular sites whose norms and rules can be hard for newcomers – British-born or not – to fathom. Some students in Greenwich depicted a harsh world where migrants struggle with language barriers in an unwelcoming, mildly racist atmosphere: ‘everyone here is a little bit racist underneath’ said one student while another commented poignantly: ‘if you find people with open mind, your way is a little bit easier.’

### **Gender again: the debate in action**

In week four in THC, the theme of gender arose again, and this time it provided a chance for students to engage with an issue which was affecting them in the here and now of the classroom. It was therefore a chance to use language to resolve a genuine problem. It was becoming evident that the male voices were dominating. The teachers set up a speaking line, where the students lined up in order of who spoke most to least in the previous lesson and, strikingly, the men in the group occupied the front positions in the line. We explored the issue by asking: ‘what do you notice about the people in the line and their position?’ Several students – especially the most vocal men – argued that the line was reflective of language skills and that the gender divide was coincidental. We challenged this, reminding students

that they were of a similar level so the divide could not have been caused solely by language. There was a lot of tension in the room when the issue was raised. The women were split as to whether gender was affecting the group dynamic. They were also divided more or less 50/50 in response to the question ‘would you speak more in a women-only group?’ During the next debate we reminded students about the gender balance. There was some evidence that the men held back during the debate, although the three men’s voices were still more or less the most dominant. During the evaluation the students agreed that they had thought about the issue and one of the male students said he had consciously tried to give other people a chance to speak.

This discussion about gender relations in the classroom was significant for several reasons; the classroom was not being used as a rehearsal, but was in fact a ‘site’ of integration in its own right and there was a lot at stake. The discussion really mattered and was deeply relevant to the group and to the class as a community. Secondly, unlike the common complaint from some language teachers that students do not listen to each other, in this particular session it was evident that students addressed each other, not the teachers, they listened to each other and it mattered to them what they thought and said.

By the end of the second stage, class discussions were no longer taking place at the surface level. Ideas had been put forward and explored in depth. Some points of view had been challenged and were starting to change. Both students and teachers had taken the discussions outside the classroom and continued them with family and friends. New understandings and opinions had been formed and we were satisfied with the time and space we had dedicated to the complexities of the themes. It was time to move on to the third stage, ‘Broadening Out’, in which we introduced ideas from outside the group for critical discussion.

## Part three: Broadening Out

The final classes in both Tower Hamlets and Greenwich were characterized by engagement with ideas from outside the classroom about the complex processes and politics of integration. Some students had asked about theories and models of integration in Britain as well as other countries such as France. In Tower Hamlets we brought quotations from key political figures for the class to grapple with. In Greenwich we introduced a pictorial code representing the ‘assimilation’ model of integration (see figure 1, below).

### Tool Box 5: Introducing ‘input’ or stimulus materials

Participatory pedagogy begins with a focus on ‘making our own meaning’ (Auerbach 2000). This means exploring the groups’ ideas, thoughts and experiences before going on to ‘interpreting’ meaning of other texts e.g. newspaper articles, teacher written model texts, text books, other students’ testimonies and online teaching resources. Given that all texts, including pedagogic texts, contain ideological messages students need particular analytical skills to be able to approach them critically rather than unquestioningly. When students have been given time and structured support to make their own meanings this facilitates the development of high level linguistic skills such as argumentation, persuasion, negotiation and compromise, which in turn helps students to develop their critical thinking skills, both in English and their other expert languages. The input phase therefore is important and also prevents the classroom from becoming too insular and ensures further opportunities for intellectual development and growth in knowledge.

### Integration=Assimilation?

The picture shows a Muslim woman who had arrived wearing a hijab but after living in the UK for a period had taken it off and was seen drinking and socializing with friends. Among the themes explored were: how far are migrants expected to reject their home culture in order to integrate and how far do they feel accepted if they don’t do that. The discussion explored whether a decision to remove the hijab might be an attempt to fit in, or whether it might point to a reluctant acceptance that the discrimination

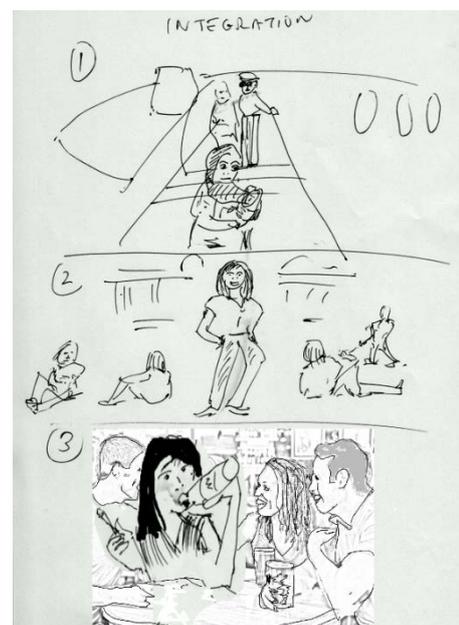


Figure 1

faced by wearers of the hijab means that any woman wearing one in the UK will always face discrimination. We remembered the anecdotes from the first session about bus doors being closed in the face of the hijab-wearing mother of one of the students; again, racism was at the fore of the discussions in Greenwich in a way that it had rarely been in Tower Hamlets. Notable in the Greenwich discussion as well, though, was that very different views were expressed even between women wearing hijabs and women from the same country. This reminded us again that difference amongst people is often glossed over when students are labelled with one dominant identity, such as their religious or national identity.

### Politicians and the problem tree

In the final session in Tower Hamlets, we critically analysed the following quotes from speeches on integration made by various politicians:

*Immigrants who settle here must do their bit to ensure that future generations grow up 'feeling British'. (David Blunkett, former Home Secretary, Labour)*

*Mass immigration has led to discomfort and disjointedness in neighbourhoods because some migrants have been unwilling to integrate or learn English. (David Cameron, PM, Conservative)*

*We need British jobs for British workers (Gordon Brown, former PM, Labour)*

*We have norms of acceptability and those who come into our home - for that is what it is - should accept those norms just as we would have to do if we went elsewhere (David Blunkett, former Home Secretary, Labour)*

*There is a generation of workshy Britons, leaving the jobs market open for migrants. Figures show that of the 2.5 million extra people in employment since 1997, three quarters were foreign-born workers. (David Cameron, PM, Conservative)*

Students discussed their reactions to these speeches and were particularly keen to talk about those which accused migrants of not wishing to integrate or learn English. They then analysed these problematic areas further using a problem tree (see Tool Box 6).



became apparent that many of us – students and teachers alike – do not feel fully ‘integrated’ even into our own ethnic ‘cultures’. One student pointed out that on the one hand she was trying to integrate into the UK and on the other she was also trying to ‘integrate into Islam’, as she put it, meaning that she was trying to find a way of practising her religion which felt comfortable for her. The reality depicted in these discussions was one of people ‘integrating’ into many different settings and making difficult personal choices to accept or reject the norms in those contexts. As a result of participating in classroom discussions, as teachers we came to see integration as a series of transitory moments of belonging and not just a question of how people from different cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds mix together.

By the end of week five we had come to the end of a structured process designed to progressively deepen the debate on integration and had used relevant participatory tools to move from making meaning to going deeper to broadening out. In the next section we explore in more detail some of the main observations we made about participatory ESOL and its effectiveness.



## Section 3 Participatory ESOL

In this section we discuss our reflections on participatory ESOL. We focus on our approach to course and lesson planning, language development, the roles of the teachers and students and how disagreement and dissent was dealt with when it arose.

### Course and lesson planning: one size does not fit all

It is important in participatory pedagogy for people to make their own meaning rather than simply respond to pre-planned topics and language targets. One of its key features is an emergent approach to course planning, i.e. one in which there is no set scheme of work or syllabus, and in which the topics and language emerge from session to session (see Winstanley and Cooke, forthcoming, for more details). So it was unsurprising that after relatively similar first sessions, the courses at THC and Greenwich diverged significantly. The emerging process is a key part of participatory pedagogy and requires a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the teachers. In this project this was facilitated by co-teaching and post-session reflections in which we could discuss the themes which seemed to be emerging. We found that an open dialogic classroom was also key to the emerging process and a high level of 'conscious listening' (Auerbach 1992) to students' responses and comments throughout the lessons. For example, the THC group was more concerned with cultural identities, while the Greenwich group was concerned with the material, structural and social barriers to integration, such as work permits, racism and the loss of cultural capital. This may reflect the structural stability of the long-standing Bangladeshi and Somali communities in Tower Hamlets who have mutual support and greater access to services and benefits. By contrast, more of the students in Greenwich did not belong to settled communities and therefore had a more urgent need for material and economic stability and a sense of belonging to the local community. This suggests that even classes in the same city which are seemingly similar in terms of level cannot be treated as the same; this greatly limits the extent to which courses can be planned in advance.

### Language development

#### Increased output

One of the most notable features of the *Whose Integration?* project is the huge amount of language produced by students. Listening to the classroom recordings it was striking how little the teachers spoke compared to the students. As other studies have shown, increased meaningful output from students can accelerate language development as it allows for

restructuring and hypothesis testing (Swain 1995). We saw this frequently during discussions when students clarified their own and others' arguments. As Cooke and Simpson (2008) point out, encouraging extended student interactions and keeping the teacher's turns short while focussing on supporting the students to say what they mean as clearly as possible, seems to enhance the language learning process. In our study this was done by limiting error correction, saving feedback about linguistic forms until after discussions and generally limiting our interventions to the clarification of meaning. We discussed this approach with students so that they were aware that participating in group discussion was not just a chaotic free-for-all but was an essential part of their language learning and that too much error correction or focus on form at the wrong moments would be counter-productive.

### Creating dialogue with students about language

Our explicit language work grew out of class discussions and built on students' existing linguistic skills and knowledge. Our lessons were not based on the introduction of new linguistic forms decided in advance. In this sense we were treating students as *users* of language as well as *learners* of language. We consider that treating ESOL students only as *learners* is to deny the wealth of linguistic experience that students already possess in English as well as their other languages. Instead of presenting or explicitly teaching new forms, we initiated discussions about discourse strategies. We would often ask how students might say a particular thing, for example 'how would you disagree without upsetting the person?' We would then engage in a meta-level discussion about language and how things are often said, including discussions about nuances and connotations. Similarly we initiated negotiations about lexical meanings, as we describe in the language focus box in Section two, Part one (Page 17). There were many instances of students paraphrasing each other to aid clarification in discussions and of them paraphrasing the teachers. Co-construction of meaning is seen as particularly productive for language acquisition (Swain 1995, 2007) and shows a high level of engagement in the linguistic process and understanding of how language works.

### Noticing language

Another technique we used was to follow up discussions with an explicit focus on useful, innovatory or impressive language the students had used. Using board work and quick drills we highlighted relevant language at discourse, sentence and word level that students might take away with them and consciously include in their repertoire. The focus on meaning

making and the resulting increased output gave us a large amount of contextualised language with which to work. We noticed students consciously re-using language we had drawn their attention to and this process of incorporating new language into individual repertoires was often immediately effective.

### Language level

By week five of the project students were able to analyse and critique political discourse, an activity they would have been far less able to do in English at the beginning of the course. Initially we had had some concerns about the Greenwich group as it was a mixed level class with most students developing skills at Entry level, and we were aware that the content of the discussions would require higher level language skills. We observed with both our classes that when we started with a meaningful discussion rather than with target language instruction and controlled practice, students performed at a higher level than would normally be expected of them. The more we worked with the groups the less sense the notion of 'levels' seemed to make and it became evident that there was a mismatch between levels ascribed to students on diagnostic tests and the language they produced during participatory activities. This is explored in other studies on participatory ESOL (Moon and Sunderland 2008, Winstanley and Cooke forthcoming).

### Student and teacher roles

Throughout the project we tried to step out of traditional teacher/student roles. We did this in several ways. For example, students were initiators, not just passive recipients of instruction and at various points during the course they proposed games, organized the layout of the room, set up activities, decided on timings and breaks, negotiated the meanings of words and phrases, brought along topics for discussion and evaluated the course. At times the teachers were very much on the sidelines in these discussions. We were also anxious to avoid positioning students as simply 'learners of English' or as representatives of their home countries. We believe that asking students about Bangladesh, for example, when they may have spent as much of their lives in Tower Hamlets does not make much sense and sets up a false 'us and them' dichotomy which we wished to challenge. Importantly, we also wished to avoid the message that the students must choose their national identity over their other identities such as local citizens, women, men, students, parents, workers, community organisers, neighbours and friends.

Changing our own role as teachers sometimes proved even more challenging for us than for students. During our reflective discussions we grappled with how far we should be ‘facilitators’ in the project and how far we should be active participants speaking with our own voices – and if the latter, how could we avoid falling back on our role as teachers, instead of participating as equals?

As we show in Section two, there were several sessions, such as those on gender in particular, in which we did interject in a personally meaningful way. At other times, we either did not contribute to the discussions or felt awkward about doing so because we felt we either had little to contribute or that our opinions were too divergent from most people in the group. For example, after a debate about religious schools in which all the students agreed that religious teaching for children was good for integration, one of the students invited the teachers to have their say. This proved difficult for us as non-religious people, and we avoided getting drawn into the debate. There were two reflections we made after this lesson: firstly, it is an unusual and salutary experience for us to be in a minority in the classroom when we are used to being in control. Secondly, although participatory pedagogy is often criticized for pushing a political agenda more interesting to teachers than students, we found that at times the reverse was true: what matters to students is not necessarily what we ourselves would choose as topics for discussion in our teaching.

Another criticism of participatory pedagogy is that teachers are an under-used resource, and at times during the project this indeed seemed true – on two occasions, in fact, students asked us to contribute more than we were. In weeks three and four we therefore decided to get more involved in discussions in terms of both language input and giving our opinions. In Greenwich the teachers shared anecdotes about their past and their lives away from school, whilst at THC we decided to deliberately raise the issue of gender relations in the classroom because it had emerged as a real here-and-now problem. The style of problem-posing we employed for this discussion was different from the de-codification process we used in other sessions i.e. the discussions about ‘She’s Gone Modern’ (Page 19) and assimilation (Page 24). The problem-posing we used for those debates was more open and exploratory, whereas the discussion about the classroom gender dynamic was more didactic. One of the students understood our intention when, during the post-class evaluation, she said approvingly ‘the teacher is trying to make the class more equal’.

### Disagreement and dissent

Another criticism levelled at participatory pedagogy is that it obliges students to discuss painful issues they would rather not discuss. The *Whose Integration?* project was characterized by a lot of discussion and debate about serious issues which we recognized might have made people feel anxious or distressed. For example, after the ‘gender’ discussion at THC we discussed how we felt about disagreement and some students commented: ‘it feels hard’ and ‘if you are just a single person and no one supports you then you are feeling difficult but if I find a lot of people like me then I feel ok.’

Similarly, session five in Greenwich, during which we discussed assimilation, was a difficult session and threw the spotlight very much on the role of the teacher. The problem posing had been hard to manage and the themes explored by the students – religion and interpretation of religious scripture – felt alien to the teachers. When the discussion became heated with a lot of disagreement, we felt like we had lost control and were out of our depth. At one point we became worried that a student who had spoken about wearing a hijab felt under attack and we reflected that it was a struggle to manage and facilitate the discussion.

However, it is important to note that none of the students said they would rather not partake in these discussions and debates and in fact it was notable that we felt more anxious about disagreement and dissent than the students. At times we felt uncomfortable and felt a strong urge to smooth things over. However, the student we had felt worried about during the hijab discussion later said she had found the tensions and disagreements ‘exciting’ while another said ‘if there is agreement it’s not worth putting forward your point of view’. It was therefore fascinating for us during our evaluation of the session to see that the experience of the students had been completely different to ours. During our reflection we asked whether as teachers we sometimes feel like the host of a party who needs to ensure that everyone is having a good time. If this is the case we would argue that this tendency would be worth resisting, because in this project, disagreement and conflict, far from being disincentives, were positive influences on group building and the development of complex language and ideas.

## Section 4 Integration: Concluding remarks

### What is integration?

At the end of ten sessions we reflected on the questions about integration we had set out to explore at the beginning of the project. During the first two sessions a number of students were still asking ‘what does integration mean?’ By the end of the project everyone had stopped asking this question, not because we had provided the answer but because it had become clear that there was no single answer. During the project we came to see integration as a state that people slip in and out of depending on the circumstances of the moment. We had experienced integration to be dynamic rather than static and as a nonlinear process of fleeting interconnecting moments rather than a final goal. Students and teachers have multiple, shifting identities and allegiances which are national, local, gender based and religious and some of these are more salient than others at different times. In fact, we would argue that no-one is ever completely integrated and that marginalisation from the mainstream occurs in many different forms.

At times the process was difficult and uncomfortable for both teachers and students. We were confronted with the unexpected and did not know what would emerge – but it was the unexpected that created change and deeper understanding. In fact, we would argue that change and adaptation are fundamental processes which we need to understand if we are to come nearer to defining ‘integration’. The content of our discussions show all the participants involved in the act of integrating, dealing with difference, dissent and commonality within and across ethnic groups. This is difficult to measure and difficult to research using interviews or focus groups. Instead it needs to be experienced and captured in the minute by minute unfolding of discussions and debates.

### ‘Spaghetti Junction’

It was important to all of us to feel a sense of belonging in various aspects of our lives, even with the knowledge that there are times when we will feel like the outsider. Although none of us were able to identify ‘British culture’, and students rejected the assimilationist rhetoric of politicians, they did have a strong desire to belong and operate effectively in their local communities. This was especially true in Greenwich where people did not belong to settled local communities in the same way as the students in Tower Hamlets. The process of adapting to a new environment requires time and the sharing of local knowledge and in this project the Greenwich class provided a useful site for people to do this.

During the project we talked of integration as being a ‘two way street’ where the onus should not be just on the migrant to adapt and understand the host nation. We observed, though, that the reality of the integration process was more complex even than this. The more accurate metaphor to describe the process was as a ‘Spaghetti Junction’, i.e. a complicated, dense set of intersections, crossroads and junctions going in lots of different directions. Unexpected alliances were formed which transcended the boundaries of culture, nationality, class and religion and many of us moved out, even if fleetingly, from our comfort zones. This process was the same for students and teachers alike.

### Barriers and anxieties

However, our students experienced significant barriers to creating these alliances with locals, with many of them having to contend with racism, anti-immigration policies and rhetoric, poverty and language difficulties. Racism was a particular concern to the Greenwich group, where students shared several experiences of racism. Not being able to work, low pay, benefit cuts and cuts to public services were examples of material impediments to integration. There was also anxiety about developments in the current climate. Recent changes to immigration policy and hostile rhetoric towards migrants were interpreted by students as a move away from multiculturalism and towards an assimilationist model. Although students were clear that migrants have responsibilities to adapt to the community they are settling into, they were concerned about impossible demands made of them to act and feel British.

### Participatory ESOL: a site of integration in action?

Given these barriers, the participatory ESOL class is a particularly important site for migrants to deliberate about issues which directly affect them. The project created a public space for dialogue about issues that affect people’s everyday lives. At a time when such spaces in public life are declining, the participatory ESOL class is an example of a site for intellectual debate and shared understanding between people who may not normally share such conversations. Participatory education is based on rigorous principles and practices such as problem posing which aim to raise a critical consciousness – what Freire called *conscientização* – about the issues which affect students’ daily lives, as well as their language and literacy learning.

We noted that the intensity of discussion in the classroom led some students to stimulate the same debates at home and with friends, and as teachers we found ourselves discussing the

issues which arose in class long after the sessions were over. It has long been recognized that an effective ESOL class reflects the lives and experiences of students (Auerbach 1992, Baynham 2006). Our project extends this concept further and shows that the participatory ESOL class itself is an important part of students' lives and is not just a rehearsal for 'real life'. As such, we suggest that it can play a part in shaping the life experiences of those who participate, and importantly, this can be done on students' own terms. In this way, participatory education can help teachers and students alike resist ESOL being used as an arena for top-down attempts to get people to adhere to dominant agendas by providing the tools to critically analyze these agendas, and where necessary, exploring ways to resist them.



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