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# Integration, Inclusion or Invisibility? Language Education for Adult Transnational Migrants in the UK and Germany

Ann Cowie Jo-Ann Delaney

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**Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to critically examine policy and practice in language education for adult migrants in the UK and Germany with the objective of interrogating the iteration of policy by national government through the perspective of pedagogic practice in two providers: a centre providing English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in the UK and another delivering *Deutsch als Fremdsprache* / DaF (German as a Foreign Language) in Germany. Data will include the providers' curricula and policies; pedagogic resources; lesson observations; and interviews with teachers and managers of the provision, to discuss their views of language education policy and the articulation of policy within their organisation. The conclusions will provide a commentary on the extent to which language education provides opportunities for a critical approach to learning for migrants or whether it is fulfilling government agendas for integration and supporting mainstream economic activity by preparing learners for work.

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L'articolo esamina in maniera critica le politiche e le pratiche nell'educazione linguistica per adulti migranti nel Regno Unito e in Germania con l'obiettivo di interrogare l'iterazione della politica da parte del governo nazionale attraverso la prospettiva aperta dalla pratica pedagogica di due agenzie: un centro che propone la lingua inglese per Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) nel Regno Unito e un'altra agenzia in Germania come *Fremdsprache* / DaF (tedesco come lingua straniera) in Germania. I dati includono i curricula e le politiche delle agenzie; le risorse pedagogiche; le osservazioni raccolte durante le lezioni; le interviste con insegnanti e manager delle agenzie e discutono le loro opinioni sulla politica di educazione linguistica e sull'articolazione della politica all'interno della loro organizzazione. Nelle conclusioni si commenta in che misura l'educazione linguistica rappresenti un'opportunità per un approccio critico all'apprendimento dei migranti e se essa rispetti i programmi governativi per l'integrazione e il sostegno all'attività economica e alla preparazione degli studenti al lavoro.

**Keywords**: Adult Education and Learning Policy Making; Social Cohesion; Equality of Access; Transnational Migrants; Language and Citizenship.

**Ann Cowie:** Canterbury Christ Church University (United Kingdom)
✉ ann.cowie@canterbury.ac.uk
Ann Cowie taught ESOL and trained ESOL teachers for 25 years mainly in further education contexts in London. She is now working as a Senior Lecturer in Post Compulsory Teacher Education and Training at Canterbury Christ Church University. Her research interests include intercultural communication, ESOL literacy and education for refugees.

**Jo-Ann Delaney**
✉ JoannDelt@gmail.com
Dr Jo-Ann Delaney has worked as an English language teacher in the UK and overseas for over 20 years and is an experienced teacher educator. Her research interests include language teacher education, bilingual learning and language education for migrants.

# 1. Introduction

The origins of the immigrant populations of the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany have changed during different periods of their history. In the UK, immigrants largely originated from the New Commonwealth in the 1960's and 70's. In Germany, post-war migration was principally made up of *Aussiedler* (ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe) and immigrants invited to contribute to the labour market, mainly from Italy, Greece and Turkey: *Gastarbeiter* or guest workers. In recent years, migrant groups in both countries have mostly consisted of those seeking refuge from persecution and more recently economic migrants. Within the European context, statistics indicate that in 2015 Germany was the country with the highest number of new immigrants seeking asylum (approx. 440,000); a far greater number than the UK (approx. 40,000).

The provision of an opportunity to gain fluency in the host country's language can give insights into the view of the role of immigrants in their new community. We refer to the groups accessing language education, as immigrants for convenience, though recognising the huge diversity within this umbrella term. In this paper we report on language education for immigrants at two adult education providers, one in the UK, one in Germany. The analysis of provision is contextualised within the edicts of government with regard to the funding and organisation of such provision, including the content of any prescribed curricula. The aspirations of both government policy and curricula are then compared to the views of those implementing both: the organisers and teachers of language classes.

# 2. Views of citizenship relevant to the discussion of language education

The provision of education and language education with a view to gaining citizenship status can mirror the social role an immigrant is supposed to take on. German citizenship has traditionally resided in the *jus sanquinis* principle (Brubaker, 1992; Anghel, 2012). This right to citizenship through blood is epitomised in Article 116 of German Basic Law, which established the right of repatriation for all Germans living in the former German territories. Until 2000, The British model has sometimes been viewed as multicultural (Bertossi, 2011), where all nationalities have equal rights to become citizens of the country. This is considered to be a by-product of the commonwealth structure which accepted economic immigrants from commonwealth territories until the 1970s.

However, the notion of national based models is not always viewed as a useful way of considering citizenship. (Bertossi, 2011; Finotelli & Michalowski, 2012; Anghel, 2012). In contrast, Durkheim's view of citizenship sets the tradition of viewing the role of the citizen in promoting a social moral beyond the individual, where every individual takes account of others contributing to a more moral and ethical state. This implies that the integration of immigrants within the new host country occurs through shared cultural values (Joppke, 2010). Looking at citizenship as consisting of shared or unshared elements lends itself well to consideration of the role of the host language and language education for immigrants. In a sense, the language spoken by an immigrant group means that they share, or remain apart from the host nation. Three paradigms provide a useful perspective on shared and unshared elements: these are: Universalism, Particularism (Joppke, 2010) and Polyethnic (Kymlicka, 1995).

Universalism proposes that all citizens subscribe to a unified set of values and these are "judicial, moral and political rather than cultural" (Joppke, 2010, p. 116). The focus in universalism is on the status and rights dimensions of citizenship yet cannot fail to impact on the identity dimension of citizenship where the individual may need to give up aspects of national identity to join the universal identity of the new home country. Universalism would suggest that it is important for immigrants to learn about and subscribe to the legal and political workings of the new country but might be free in their private lives to follow cultural and social practices of their home country.

In contrast, particularism acknowledges the possibility of difference and recognises the fact that different perspectives on values rather than an agreed set of values is a positive force in any state. Language is perhaps one of the strongest articulation of particularism in countries such as Canada and Belgium, where the existence of different language groups is fully acknowledged and forms part of the structure of

the state. Learning the language is often "a matter of practical exigency, not of identity" (Joppke, 2010, p.133).

Kymlicka argues that integration is more "just" when "immigrants have the option to stay in their original culture" (Kymlicka, 1995, p. 96). This is a model of polyethnic citizenship, where immigrants would be allowed and encouraged to continue their cultural practices within the new host nation. An example would be religious groups being exempt from retail opening laws. With regard to language education, Kymlicka argues for the importance of immigrants' mother tongue and criticises the ideal of a unilingual society. A polyethnic model, therefore, promotes diversity in the legal, political and cultural dimensions of citizenship.

## 3. Current standing in language education for immigrants in the UK and Germany

In the UK, language education is provided as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in Further and Adult Education providers as well as charitable organisations. Despite Government rhetoric emphasising the importance to cohesion and national security of learning English, there is no current strategy for ESOL in England and Wales, and consequently provision is fragmented and without clear agreement about the aims or purpose of ESOL. From very high levels of funding in the first ten years of the 21st Century, funding cuts have halved the ESOL budget over a period of 5 years, with a budget of £203 million in 2009/10, falling to £104m in 2014/15 (Demos, 2014). According to NATECLA (2016), student numbers fell from a peak in 2006 when 500,000 people enrolled on ESOL classes, to 131,000 in 2015–16. Funding is increasingly devolved to cash-strapped local authorities. Currently the only groups entitled to free ESOL classes are those who are 'actively seeking work,' effectively excluding low paid workers, mothers with young children and older people.

The 2016 Casey Review into opportunity and integration, identified areas of the country with high concentrations of immigrants, where a combination of isolation and social deprivation was seen to be leading to economic costs associated with unemployment, criminality, prejudice and division. A special mention was made of Muslim women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, who represented the lowest levels of English language competence in the UK. Yet a study by the Wonder Foundation (2016) found that women immigrants wanted to study, but faced the greatest barriers to accessing ESOL classes, including the high cost and inconvenient location of classes, lack of childcare and lack of provision at lower levels. Asylum seekers are effectively prevented from studying for the first six months, and subsequently their participation is at the discretion of their local provider until their status is recognised, as they technically they are expected to pay 50% of their fees. Those on spouse visas are expected to pay prohibitive overseas student fees for up to three years, often delaying the start of their study (Casey, 2016).

The introduction in 2002 of a language and "Life in the UK" citizenship test means that immigrants seeking to remain in the UK must demonstrate a level of English which currently is not well supported by state funded tuition. The expectation is that immigrants' level of language proficiency should be at least Entry 3 on the UK skills levels, equivalent to B1 (intermediate) on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

In Germany, all immigrants have access to an *Integrationskurs* (integration course), which includes both language and information about German culture, politics and society. The aim of the integration course is to allow participants to pass a language test and a test about living in Germany, which they will need to apply for citizenship. In contrast to the UK, these courses are well funded with a 660 hours of study completely free to many immigrants, including those from the EU. Certain nationalities are prioritized for free places, mainly those with an estimated good chance of successfully applying for citizenship. The level of language proficiency required to pass the language test DTZ / *Deutschtest für Zuwanderer* (German for immigrants) is set as B1 on the CEFR. There is additional recognition of the needs of immigrants with poor educational backgrounds who are new to reading and writing. They have an additional 300 hours of study funded to support the development of literacy skills.

# 4. A contrastive study of two adult education providers – methodology

In Germany, the research activities took place at the adult education centre or *Volkeshochschule* (VHS) of Munich, the capital city of Bavaria in south east Germany with a population of approximately 1.5 million. The VHS is fully state funded and provides a large range of adult education courses in many disciplines. In the UK, the research activities were based in a large Further Education College in south London. The borough in which the College is situated has a population of approximately 320,000 within the area of Greater London with a population of 8.5 million.

The first set of data to be examined was the articulation of government policy in relation to language education for immigrants in public documents, which included an audit of teaching schemes of work and teaching resources. This documentation was analysed to search for views on the expected roles for immigrants in each country. The second source for the study was a series of interviews with individuals responsible for the organisation and the teaching of the language programmes for immigrants. These were semi structured interviews, where participants were provided with some questions in advance, but opportunity for wider discussion during the interviews. The final source for the study is field notes taken during the observation of language lessons with immigrant groups. The observations focussed on the linguistic content of the lessons, but also, where appropriate, on the subject content which related to legal, social and political knowledge about the host country.

A summary of the participants and activities is given below.

**Table 1** – participants in Germany

| Name of participant (changed) | Role | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| Kalu | Teacher and Co-ordinator of language and integration courses at VHS. | Interview |
| Birgit | Co-ordinator of language courses for all students at the VHS. | Interview |
| Inge | Organiser and teacher of language courses for new immigrants.<br>Author of teaching materials. | Interview and observation of lesson. |
| Ayla | German language teacher.<br>Own first language is Turkish. | Interview and observation of lesson. |

**Table 2** – participants in the UK

| Name of participant (changed) | Role | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| Louise | ESOL teacher. | Interview |
| Teresa | ESOL teacher. Own first language is Spanish. | Interview |
| Amina | ESOL teacher. Own first language is Arabic. | Interview and observation of lesson. |

## 5. Language and citizenship in government policy and course curricula

In Germany there is a clear view of the importance of learning German as set out by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

> If you would like to live in Germany, you should learn German. This is important if you are looking for work, if you need to fill in application forms, if you would like to support your children in school or if you would like to meet new people. Also, you should know certain things about Germany, for example, about its history, culture and its legal system.[1]

Those who wish to stay in Germany are encouraged to attend an integration course. This course is free for many immigrants and for refugees and asylum seekers who are in receipt of state benefits, attendance on a course may be made compulsory. Of the 660 hours of study provided, 600 are devoted to language tuition and 60 hours orientation course dealing with aspects of German life, including the legal and political system.

The curriculum of the integration course is prescribed by the state and both aspects, the language and orientation elements, are set out in curriculum documents. The aim of the language course is for participants to attain A2 or B1 language proficiency. The linguistic themes which should be covered are defined as:

- Dealing with the situation of being an immigrant
- Expressing feelings, views and opinions
- Dealing with disagreement and conflict
- Making social contacts
- Dealing with own language learning

Taken from the *Rahmencurriculum für Integrationskurse Deutsch als Zweitsprache* (Outline curriculum for the integration course German as a second language).

The language constructs outlined in the curriculum would provide competences in different situations an immigrant is likely to face and some of these are very practically oriented. Learning materials also suggest that practical situations such as dealing with doctors and schools are part of the situational language. It is also interesting that there is an expectation in the language outcomes that the course should equip immigrants to present their own views and potentially engage in discussion which involve

1. German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, http://www.bamf.de/EN/Willkommen/DeutschLernen/Integrationskurse/integrationskurse-node.html.

disagreement and conflict. This suggests a recognition that immigrants will not always be expected to agree or fall in line with German social, political or legal positions.

Likewise, the content of the orientation course, which comprises three modules, is set out as:

1. Politics and democracy
2. History and responsibility
3. People and society

Taken from the *Vorläufiges Curriculum für einen bundesweiten Orientierungskurs* (Ongoing curriculum for a state wide orientation course).

The aims of the orientation course articulate clearly that the basis of the course should be factual and that the aspiration is that participants will both know and understand the facts about political and social life in Germany. In addition, there is reference to this knowledge being used *in einen positiven Dialog einzutreten* (as part of a positive dialogue). It states that different interests, positions and values are the starting point for the course, suggesting that conflicting views from different cultures are welcome. The use of the word *Konflikt* (conflict) as something to welcome sets out the potential for a polyethnic approach in the documentation.

In England and Wales, a previous well-funded initiative by the 1997–2010 Labour Government produced a National Curriculum with accompanying materials, tests for learners, training for teachers, and a large expansion in provision. A separate project developed National Citizenship materials, with similar themes to the German orientation course, presenting a view of a multicultural nation where use of mother tongue and celebration of different cultural traditions was promoted. However, funding for these projects has ended, and resources allowed to date, despite calls from organisations such as Demos and Natecla for a national ESOL strategy and a restoration of funding. In the college visited, the national curriculum in currently not in common use.

## 6. Language education for immigrants in practice

In this section we explore the extent to which the aspirations detailed above are realised in some of the classroom practices discussed with teachers and observed in lessons. We acknowledge the relatively small sample used. Nevertheless, some of the themes which emerge are consistent over a number of participants.

The aims of the language course for German immigrants focusses on practical use of the language and this is very much reflected in the themes in text books produced for these courses. Topics such as shopping, seeing the doctor and renting accommodation appear in a range of books at different levels. The language items allow for expression of opinion and presenting discursive arguments, depending on the level. One point to consider in identifying the purpose of the language instruction is the emphasis placed on correct usage and opportunities for translanguaging. An overall focus on accuracy, both in writing and in speaking reinforces a unilingual approach since it encourages everyone to use the language in the same way following the same linguistic rules.

Kalu explains that the language exam for immigrants is more tolerant of errors in both writing and pronunciation and that students would not be penalised for errors, it is the ability to respond appropriately and intelligibly which is recognised. However, despite this focus on communicative competence in the exam, students in his lessons were concerned with acquiring the correct accent. His response to learners encouraged a less unilingual approach, acknowledging the importance of non-standard pronunciation.

> What's wrong with having an accent, the Bavarians have an accent, the important thing is speaking clearly, though he acknowledged that German society emphasised correct pronunciation and recognised that some teachers, in his view, the German native speaker teachers:

> spend two hours on phonetic and think about how many words you could learn in this time.[2]

A similar contrast could be found in the field notes on the lesson observed. Both Inge and Ayla emphasised the importance of communication and acquiring skills to interact in everyday situations. The classroom walls, however, featured large sheets of paper with verb conjugations, indicating an emphasis on correct grammatical usage, even with a very beginner group. The lesson also featured examples of correction of students' language. There was also work done on decontextualized verb forms: *ich spiele / er spielt* (I play / he plays), which suggested a concern with accuracy above expression of meaning.

The integration course for immigrants also aims to provide factual information and the possibility to discuss differences and to explore potential conflict. These aims are supported by teachers' views. Kalu felt that this part of the programme was what he enjoyed most as it had the potential for sharing viewpoints. He gave an example of discussing the legal position of using corporal punishment with one's children, which was not allowed in Germany but "in most cultures it's normal." He felt that it was important for immigrant groups to know where they were potentially committing an illegal act.

Not all of the factual information was welcomed by students and Kalu reported that many students complained that it was boring and made comments such as: "Why do I have to know about the Second World War, I just want to work and earn money." He viewed the purpose of the course as giving "a sense of what Germany is about, why it's the way it is today, how things work." This was supported by Inge and Ayla who felt there was a strong element of *Interkulturellesensibilizierung* (sensitisation to cultural differences).

One of the aims of the programme articulated in its curriculum is to have a positive dialogue about differences which might involve potential conflict. Whether this is possible in reality is questionable. Kalu believed that he, as an immigrant, was better placed to have a more balanced view, whereas German teachers tended to focus on presenting the way things were done in Germany: *So is daß hier in Deutschland, Es wird so geschrieben*"[3] (This is the way it is here in Germany, it is written this way). Feedback from students indicated that simply presenting the facts ended with an idealised version of Germany being presented where all people were equal and everybody's rights were protected. In the end students felt:

> we're not good enough, this is like the perfect society and if you look at the curriculum, this is how it's presented, it's all about how perfect we (Germans) are *demokratie und alles* (democracy and all).[4]

Inge and Ayla also discussed examples of the cultural exchange. One of these was an activity related to the way to behave on public transport. Inge explained that through role play students would learn that in Germany it is not acceptable to move about or make eye contact. The outcome of the activity was that students would adapt their behaviour to the German way of behaving to fit in.

An illustrative incident occurred during the lesson observation. As a language point, Inge explained the difference between *brutto* and *netto* (gross and net) salary. On hearing that from a gross salary of 4,000 Euros, the expected net salary would be about 2,700 Euros because of the deductions for welfare payments, there was an audible gasp in the classroom and students seemed very shocked. Inge's view of this shock factor was: *Daß is aber gut* (But that's a good thing).[5] She believed that such deductions in salary were unequivocally beneficial. She said that many immigrants viewed their state as a *feindliche Sache* (an enemy thing) and that it was important that they learned the state was their friend and would support them in a way that their family might support them in their own culture. The German way of viewing the state is thus presented as positive rather than a contested view.

2. Interviewee 1 (Kalu, teacher and co-ordinator of German language courses, himself an immigrant from West Africa. Interview notes available from Jo-Ann Delaney).

3. Interviewee 2 (Birgit, German language course co-ordinator. Interview notes available from Jo-Ann Delaney).

4. Interviewee 1 (Kalu, as above).

5. Interviewee 3 (Inge, German language organiser, teacher and materials writer. Interview notes available from Jo-Ann Delaney).

The ESOL provision at the London college has been significantly affected by funding cuts, resulting in increased fees and reductions in course hours to six per week for adults, in an attempt to keep fees at an affordable level. A requirement of the funding is that learners take an exam each term. The stated aim of the Ascentis ESOL exams (2018) mentions both employability and integration:

> by improving their communication and fluency in English, learners will significantly improve their employability skills. Furthermore, these learners will benefit from the development of the ability to access service providers and to have the linguistic confidence to travel, work and socialise beyond their local community.

With this focus on language skills rather than accuracy, (learners take an exam in speaking skills in the first term, reading in the second and writing in the third), one would expect to see a similar balance in the course syllabus and resources.

In practice, schemes of work tend to be individual documents written by the class teachers, with no reference to the national curriculum, apparently widely regarded as defunct. The schemes of work are often based around the structure of EFL course books such as Headway or Life, with units generally organised around grammatical structures, whether explicit or implicit. Exam practice, focussed on skills, is added to this where it seems to fit, or in exam preparation slots. Whereas in the past teachers used to embed employability, citizenship and numeracy in their lessons, they now feel the pressure of time: "Some of the things we used to teach, but now we can't, because we haven't got time."[6] Low levels of English are also seen as a barrier to discussion of the wider context of living in the UK. The same teacher continued: "I allow the language to take most of my time. There isn't much else I can do... they don't understand the language so everything else is out the window any." Resources tend to either be photocopied directly from the EFL course-books, or if there is time, adapted to make them more relevant to the learners. Teachers of ESOL literacy on the other hand are forced to make their own resources as there are few suitable published resources. None of the teachers interviewed used the National ESOL resources, and two were not aware that they were still available.

The teachers had a range of views regarding the purpose of ESOL in the UK. There was a common perception that the Government's purpose in funding ESOL was purely economic: "Once you speak the language, you can find work. If you don't find work, you're sent to JCP [Job Centre courses], and if you don't go, they cut your benefits."[7] The colleges at management level were also seen as interested merely in bums on seats rather than in providing a service to the local community, and saw their role on the front line as coming into conflict with these other interests: "When classes are cut, it's the ESOL teachers who put up a fight."[8] Their own views regarding the purpose of ESOL depended on their personal histories. The non-native speaking teachers recalled their own experiences and focussed on being able to manage better or even on the need to access some cultural understanding in order to survive.

> Learning the language and the culture is the way to be able to survive in another country and culture that's not your own. Because, very simple things, like I have two children, I have to tell them you can't do that [sticking up two fingers], it's just a gesture, but in the scheme of things, it's a bigger thing, so you don't get in a fight. So for me, it's very important, it could literally mean life or death.[9]

On the other hand, the native born teacher saw the purpose of ESOL as primarily for getting people into jobs, helping children with their homework and making friends with the neighbours.

The translation of these attitudes into lessons and resources also differed. Two of the teachers stated that the only aspects of citizenship they planned into the scheme of work were festivals. Interestingly,

6. Interviewee 4 (Teresa, ESOL teacher in London, has worked in ESOL for over 20 years, born in Spain. Interview notes available from Ann Cowie).

7. Interviewee 5 (Amina, ESOL teacher in London, has worked in ESOL for 6 years, born in Sudan. Interview notes available from Ann Cowie).

8. Interviewee 4 (as above).

9. Interviewee 5 (as above).

whereas this topic used to be an expression of a multicultural ideology, as presented in the ESOL Citizenship materials, this pared down version now consisted of an entirely mainstream Christian list of festivals and special days: "Christmas, Easter, Bonfire night, Valentine's Day, Pancake Day, everything!,"[10] suggesting a shift to an assimilationist or universalist model. Teachers explained that although they took seriously the need at the beginning of the course to explain the law and the rules of the College, regarding the Equalities Act and racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of prejudice and discrimination, this was mainly so that students knew what kind of expressed views would get them into trouble, and they did not see it as their role to change the students' views, and would largely avoid discussions on sensitive issues. The Muslim teacher felt "it is important to say this is the law of the land, but not in a way to make their [the students'] belief sound like it's wrong,"[11] promoting a more polyethnic view.

In the observed lesson of Amina the aims were to practise speaking and writing skills for the exam and invited students to express their opinions about immigration. With no grammar outcomes, the language focus was on lexis and word stress for intelligibility. In delivery, despite the intention not to enforce any attitudes or values on the students, and with visuals raising issues such as protests against deportation of asylum seekers, the scope of the debate was effectively limited because the class time was largely taken up with the lists of vocabulary to be defined, the set questions to be debated, and the statements to be ranked. The class rules prohibited mention of anything too controversial such as attitudes towards controls on immigration and implications of Brexit. Delayed feedback was provided on some vocabulary items and pronunciation focussed on word stress, with the aim of increasing intelligibility. From the schemes of work and resources used by the other teachers, it is expected that observations of other teachers, using activities from course books, would have a greater focus on grammar and accuracy.

## 7. Conclusions

Both the UK and Germany continue to receive groups of immigrants and provide them with some support. The stated position of both governments suggest that language education is an important part of that support. However, the UK currently shows less political will to co-ordinate or fund a coherent programme for both language and citizenship education and is less willing to provide language education when the outcome of the asylum application is not yet certain.

Programme curricula, language level expectation and language tests suggest the possibility of a particularist view of citizenship, where immigrants may express values contrasting those of the host country. They may also use language with non-standard grammar and pronunciation and still be successful in their exam.

Classroom practice presents a more nuanced picture. Correct grammar and pronunciation is sometimes promoted over communicative competence. Information about the host country is presented factually, sometimes through the explanation of a language point. However, in some cases, teachers may present the factual information as a positive value, which they expect their students to ascribe to. Thus, the potential for a polyethnic perspective is limited as a deliberate policy and remains a contested area with some variation in the views of teachers.

10. Interviewee 6 (Louise, ESOL teacher in London, has worked in ESOL for over 25 years, born in the UK. Interview notes available from Ann Cowie).

11. Interviewee 5 (as above).

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