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Unlocking Learners' Experience to Develop Speaking Skills in a Female ESOL Entry One Class

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British Council ELT Master's Dissertation Awards: Commendation

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Contents Page

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

DfES   Department for Education and Skills

EAL   English as an Additional Language

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

ESOL   English for Speakers of Other Language

JSA   Job Seekers Allowance

NATECLA   National Association for Teaching English and Community
              Languages to Adults

NRDC   National Research and Development Centre for Literacy and
              Numeracy

PGCE   Post Graduate Certificate in Education

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

TESOL   Teaching English as a Second Language

1. General Introduction

This critical study is an action research project (with an ethnographic texture), based in an adult ESOL class. I have aimed to investigate the following questions:

Q1. How can learners' own knowledge and experience be used to develop dialogue in the ESOL classroom?

Q2. In what ways can ESOL teachers be supported to extend learner talk?

The first question arose from my own teaching and observations of other teachers; the second arose from a survey of six tutors in my team (appendix 1). To investigate these questions I describe my professional development as this informs the type of teacher I have become, and the motivations for asking these questions. Action research is considered, as a method for exploring pedagogical issues. The questions are then considered by taking a participatory approach to teaching ESOL in my own classroom, and I have analysed three 'interventions' in two classroom settings. Each intervention poses questions for reflection (QR) which inform the progress of the research. Finally, the study relates the analysis of the data to the development of my professional practice, and that of the service I work for.

2. My Professional Background

I am an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher working in community education in a large northern city. I have been teaching ESOL for over 8 years and currently I am the Lead Tutor for the local authority service I work for. The role of Lead Tutor is to develop good practice in teaching and learning, to develop resources, and to disseminate these to other tutors in the service. As part of this quality improvement role I conduct observations of teaching and learning, and support tutors to improve all aspects of their teaching. I continue to teach classes myself, as both I and my manager consider it vital to the role; teaching ensures that I maintain an awareness of the communities accessing ESOL classes, their current concerns and

motivations and most importantly, I am able to develop my own practice as part of the team that I support.

I trained as an ESOL teacher by studying for a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education and concurrently taking an ESOL Specialism course. I did this as in-service training, teaching at the same time as studying, and using my paid delivery as my teaching practice. The circumstances as to how this happened are relevant to the fact that I work in community-based education as opposed to college-based classes, and have they influenced my approach to teaching. I worked for a few years as a co-ordinator of a local charity that supported failed asylum seekers. I ran a small community café that relied on the volunteering of these asylum seekers and other local people, and some of the beneficiaries lived in accommodation above the café. The café provided cheap or free meals for asylum seekers and other homeless people. There was a strong network between us and other groups and charities engaged in related work and it was a strong community in which I had a central role. Consequently I spent a lot of my time with people from many countries, of different ethnic and faith backgrounds to myself, and I started to learn about their cultural practices. A frequent customer to the café was the local authority ESOL Lead who, knowing that I had worked in teaching/training in the past, suggested that I took the PGCE course and she would employ me as a tutor. I was really motivated to try as I found working with asylum seekers to be fulfilling, especially because of my commitment to social justice. I was concerned that I had no English teaching background and she told me that I could learn to teach English, but that she had trouble in finding teachers who really understood the local communities and the challenges faced by the learners we find in ESOL classes. I took her advice, managed to secure a place on the PGCE course one week before it started, and started teaching in the same week. I had one class of 12 people who were from 11 different places and spoke 9 different languages. I felt inspired and excited, but overwhelmed. I still maintain that those twelve people taught me how to teach and that my prior knowledge of some of their communities enabled me to start to understand their needs and make connections with them that allowed me to build trust.

The route by which I started my ESOL career helps to define the type of teacher I am. Working with asylum seekers enabled me to see the power of language, and how having a command of English language gives people access to services and networks that increase and improve social inclusion. The learners we have in community learning are often the most socially disadvantaged, and my skill and motivation lies with teaching those people.

> *In ESOL contexts, many students experience inequality as a matter of course, and are often among the most marginalised in society as a whole. Those involved in their education are in a position to work to counter the power imbalances inherent in their daily lives.* (Simpson, 2012)

My official job title is *tutor* but in our daily work lives we refer to ourselves as *teachers*. Historically the tutors employed by the local authority ran leisure classes which were non-accredited and did not require any formal teaching qualification. With the advent of the Adult ESOL Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001) we introduced accredited courses and tutors were required to have teaching qualifications. Throughout this study I have used the words *tutor* and *teacher* interchangeably, as we do in our workplace.

3. The Research Setting

Community Learning ESOL classes take place close to people's homes, in primary schools, community centres and church halls. They aim to be accessible to local people and whilst they lack impressive facilities, the level of commitment of tutors and support staff is often exemplary, and the quality of teaching can be of a very high standard. Typically, these classes are accessed by women more than by men, but also by new arrivals and anyone with young children, as classes fit around school times. Currently, approximately 75% of our ESOL learners are women. Some classes are designated to be for women only and this is the case with the class I have focused my research on. Childcare is often provided and Community Learning Champions encourage and support learners to attend other activities and classes. Learners find these classes through these Champions, as they are

based in local community organisations that they access for advice and guidance. Many of the people in community ESOL classes would not attend college courses due to lack of confidence, time or ability to travel out of their local area. They like to attend with their neighbours, friends and family members, and many learners need the support and encouragement of their peers to keep attending. I have taught many groups of sisters, mothers/daughters and cousins and learning in inter-generational groups is the norm for the communities I work with as it replicates their social and family groups. This strengthens the identities of learners within the class and gives them the power to be themselves as ESOL learners.

There is a need to define the concept of culture here. I often referring to learners' 'cultures' being of importance in the classroom and other tutors use this word too. However, the cultures of the learners are varied and individual and no two people of the same 'culture' do things the same way, and neither are learners from just one culture. If we take the Yemeni women in my class, they have the influence of their lives in Yemen, but their immediate family members may have lived in the UK for many years. When we talk about culture in ESOL we are really talking about 'what people do' and so in this study that is what I mean by culture. I have intermittently used the terms 'culture' and 'practices', which is the term preferred by Gonzalez in her research (2009).

I have taught in a range of ESOL classes in different settings and levels, but all have been community based. Until recently all of these classes were organised by level, according to the ESOL Adult Core Curriculum (DfES, 2001), and were either non-accredited or accredited which determined the funding stream. Classes were normally 2x 2 hours per week for ten weeks. Since I became Lead Tutor two years ago we have continued with this delivery model but have also attracted funding from other sources and offer classes for JSA claimants which build in employability, a class based in asylum seeker accommodation, a large project for the Roma community, and a set of classes for refugees under humanitarian protection. Part of my research is based in this latter class, but the main focus is in a class that falls under our 'conventional' ESOL offer and is an Entry One group.

This Entry One Women's ESOL class is based in a primary school in a deprived inner-city area. It has 12 learners. The age range of learners is from 25 years to 38 years, although there have been older women in this class in previous years. The following table shows the language and ethnicity of the learners. It shows 13 learners, as one joined after another left to have a baby. All but one learner is Muslim and there is a dominance of Arabic speakers (and specifically Yemeni Arabic speakers) which requires careful management at times, as though I see mother tongue as being a vital part of classroom talk, all learners must feel included and a balance has to be agreed.

Composition of class by ethnicity and language:

No of learners	Ethnicity	Language
3	Pakistani	Urdu/Panjabi (Mirpuri)
6	Yemeni	Arabic
1	Romanian	Romanian
1	Ethiopian	Oromo
1	Sudanese	Arabic
1	Libyan	Arabic

Three of the women have lived in the UK for less than five years, but the majority have lived here for ten years or more. They are often learning English at this stage in their lives because they have previously been caring for children and extended family at home, or have not felt ready to join a class. It is often when a woman starts to take a child to school that she gains the confidence to attend a class, with encouragement from school staff and husbands. The local Learning Champion often has a key role here, and the relationships of trust between them and learners is central to community education. Some of the learners are required to learn English in order to satisfy residency legislation and statutory testing, but this is not the case for all of them. Most are motivated by their need and desire to communicate in English with their local community and with their own children. Motivation is

considered to be one of the key factors for successful language learning by Lightbown and Spada (2006: 63)

Of the 13 learners in this group only 3 have spent any significant time in school in their home country. The others have either never attended school, or have attended for three or four years, and have limited L1 literacy. This has a significant impact on their learning of English and these women are the ones I am most interested in observing for this study. We refer to these learners as Basic Literacy Learners. Spiegel and Sunderland define a basic literacy learner as *someone who is still learning to read a short simple text and struggles to write a sentence independently* and whose first language does not use the Roman script (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006:15). Most of my learners will say that they are unable to read and write their mother tongue but I have witnessed that they can usually read and write to some level and therefore bring transferrable skills and knowledge of how writing systems operate. I have, at times, taught learners who do not recognise the connections between the written and the spoken word, but in this specific group there is no-one for whom this is the case. The term basic literacy learner does not give an indication of their ability to speak English, or of the rich spoken texts they may know from their own cultures. However, the learners in this group have limited spoken English but all are confident to use spoken English as much as they are able within the classroom.

4. Introduction to the Research

I had little knowledge of how to teach ESOL when I took on an Entry One class at the same time as starting my PGCE. My new manager gave me support by email and by visiting my class every few weeks. She told me that a recent report had said that ESOL classes generally placed too much emphasis on literacy, and not enough on speaking English. I later recognised this to be a NIACE report on the ESOL Effective Practice Project which reported that the most effective ESOL classes enabled learners to produce longer utterances of speech by drawing on their own lives and experiences outside the classroom (Baynham et al, 2007). I noticed immediately that most of my learners were quite confident in their speaking skills but that these were actually very functional and lacked good grammar, intonation and

pronunciation, and were far from standard use of English. They were very limited in their ability to converse in English and to express themselves and give opinions.

If I followed the ESOL Core Curriculum materials (DfES, 2011) then I was destined to teach learners how to ask for items in shops, name fruit and vegetables, say prescribed phrases to a doctor about coughs and rashes, but not to give opinions, engage in conversations, and to develop their speaking skills to enable them to talk in the transactions that were important to them as individuals. I recall thinking that the core curriculum materials were lacking personalisation and using them alone would not equip learners with realistic language that related to their own needs and circumstances. The focus was on listening to, and repeating, stock phrases that the DfES thought were important and pertinent to everyday life in the UK.

4.1 ESOL and EFL

The ESOL specialism input of the PGCE was two hours per week and mainly delivered by visiting lecturers. The focus was mainly EFL based and I found it a paradox that our subject specialist lecturer was keen to differentiate the difference between EFL and ESOL, and to tell us how basic literacy learners in ESOL classes had very different needs to EFL learners, yet gave us no direction on how to teach those very learners.

David Block defines the EFL context:

> *Learners undertake formal classroom study of a language which*
> *is not the typical language of communication in their community for*
> *example learning English in countries such as Albania, Brazil and*
> *Poland* (Block, 2003 in Paton and Wilkins, 2009, p12)

Block describes another context (now known as ESOL), where a class takes place in a community where English is spoken and suggests that *learners have potential multiple opportunities of contact with the target language outside the classroom* (Block, 2003 in Paton and Wilkins, 2009, p12). When considering my E1 class I would put the emphasis on the word *potential*, as the opportunities my learners take up are limited. This is a fundamental

consideration when I make decisions on how to teach, as I have to maximise the potential to learn to use English in the classroom, knowing that these women spend a large amount of time in the home. Paton and Wilkins (2009:13) state that ESOL teachers need to develop strategies that enable our learners to extend their learning beyond the classroom and I would add we need to unlock that potential. Where learners are socially isolated from the English-speaking world, and limited in confidence to speak English away from the classroom, it takes an approach which is personalised and which acknowledges the learners' cultural knowledge. This is the approach I want to explore, and to contribute to filling a gap in ESOL research.

Paton and Wilkins succinctly differentiate the context of ESOL from EFL by saying that ESOL learners are:

> *normally aware of specific situations in their lives for which*
> *they need to use the language they are learning, and it is not*
> *an option to wait until their language is more developed before*
> *they go into these situations …….. they may have a lot of stress*
> *in dealing with difficult areas of their life, which is compounded by*
> *the need to use English in those areas.*
> (Paton and Wilkins, 2009: 15-16)

This is in addition to experiencing differences between languages and cultures, and differing experiences and expectations of education, including no prior experience of education. Consequently the EFL materials available to ESOL tutors are limited in their suitability, and this largely applies to both pedagogical theories and approaches, and classroom materials.

Most of the ESOL learners I have taught have been basic literacy learners. I do not find it difficult to teach learners to read and write and there is a range of approaches available for me to access. For example, I regularly use *Language Experience*, an approach first developed by Sylvia Ashton Warner (1963) to teach reading and writing, and have developed my own approach to teaching literacy, which incorporates this technique where needed, either for individuals or for the whole class group.

The questions I have asked myself as a teacher have concerned the development of speaking skills, and especially how to develop and improve

the spoken English of those learners who have some English proficiency by being immersed in the English world, where their children speak English more than mother tongue, and family members converse in English and mother tongue in a hybrid way. Returning to my earlier points about potential opportunities to use English, there is also a question of how can I make the most of classroom time to encourage extended speaking that builds the confidence and ability to take up these potential opportunities. I know that many of the learners do not take up these opportunities as there are barriers of culture, faith, language, gender and accessibility. Norton (1995) acknowledges the imbalance of the power of different languages which affects learners when using English outside of the classroom. Increasing confidence to use English and to extend spoken language, could give learners a heightened chance of taking up the opportunities available to them, and give them more power within the family and community.

Three years ago I started to formally observe other tutors delivering ESOL and to develop action plans to improve the quality of that delivery. I repeatedly noticed the lack of development of speaking skills in the classrooms I observed. Even where tutors considered themselves to be teaching speaking, they were speaking far more than the learners, and cutting learners short when something beyond the lesson topic was mentioned. To me, these were the moments where learners were trying to speak authentically and independently, and where the conversations had the potential to become richer and owned by the learners. I considered these to be *golden moments* where classroom talk stepped beyond the 'listen and repeat' mode and into learners using their own agency. So many golden moments were being lost, sometimes in a damaging way to the learner, giving the message that 'you can only say what I tell you to say'; in many classes there were no opportunities to create golden moments. Yet in other classes I saw many golden moments, and I perceived these to be created by the teacher giving learners time, building confidence, and allowing learners to have a voice. This was often happening when teachers could be flexible and allow the lesson to take a different turn to that one planned, and by using creative tasks and

contexts that were interesting and relevant to the learners, taking a dialogic approach to teaching.

It was in these contexts that my research questions arose: from my own reflections on my attempts to create the right setting for learners to produce authentic speech, and from the realisation that most ESOL tutors were failing to create or allow learner-directed speaking time in lessons. This is not a phenomenon exclusive to adult ESOL learning. Conteh reports that:

> *Talk contributes to effective learning in a vast range of ways,*
> *but in many primary classrooms the opportunities children*
> *have to engage fully in collaborative, exploratory talk are very*
> *limited.* (Conteh, 2002:32).

Speaking opportunities were not being created in ESOL classes, and frequently the right conditions for authentic learner talk were not being created, whilst in some cases learners were actively discouraged from speaking beyond giving the 'right' answers to teacher questions in transmissive-approach classrooms. If I wanted to improve speaking skills in basic literacy learners across the service, I first needed to explore how to do this with my own learners.

5. Relevant Background Literature

The main body of literature I have considered in relation to my research has covered three main areas: ESOL and other general pedagogy, literature relating to classroom based action research, and the concept of 'funds of knowledge' explored in *Funds of Knowledge* (Gonzalez et al, 2009).

5.1 ESOL Pedagogy

There is little literature that informs ESOL teachers how to teach their subject matter, and nor are there many suitable teaching resources. EFL or TESOL has a large range of commercial textbooks and student workbooks which are unsuitable for lower entry level ESOL, being grammar based and prescriptive. As referred to earlier, they focus on subject matters that are relevant to young, wealthier students and are not of a low enough level, usually following a

grammatical progression within a product-based curriculum. EFL pedagogy has a wide range of literature to support it and some of this is helpful. However, the daily lot of the ESOL tutor is to either continually adapt and edit EFL resources, or to create new, bespoke resources. Most opt for this latter option and resources are shared both informally and through websites such as *Skills Workshop* and through NATECLA workshops and regional meetings I have found three texts useful in my teaching and these are *Teaching Basic Literacy to ESOL Learners* (Spiegel and Sunderland, 2006), *Teaching Adult ESOL: Principle and Practice* (Paton and Wilkins, eds. 2009) and Jeremy Harmer's guide to teaching English language (Harmer, 2007). There is also a growing body of research (still small) on Participatory ESOL and these are pertinent to my own research. The major body of these texts relates to the theories behind participatory ESOL rather than the actual pedagogy, and also generally uses examples from classes at higher Entry level or above. There is a dearth of material on participatory approaches with lower ability ESOL learners, and especially with women only groups.

In participatory ESOL texts there is a commonly used phrase of *bringing the outside* in which I use continually when supporting tutors to develop a more learner centred approach. (Baynham, 2006) I feel this phrase needs further expansion as bringing in the outside world is only a part of the answer to changing the dynamic of the classroom. I see ESOL teachers bringing in the outside world, but it is so often **their own outside world** and their experiences from their own cultural viewpoint. There is an argument against this practice in order to maintain a safe environment for learners (Simpson, 2011) but I am working from the position that tutors would not allow learners to feel threatened by classroom practices. This world outside the classroom is researched and linked to pedagogy in *Funds of Knowledge* (Gonzales, 2009) and is explored, in relation to ESOL in section 4.2.

A recent set of related papers (Winstanley and Cooke, 2016) on participatory ESOL have been the first real guides on how to actually teach using a participatory approach, as previous research has focused on why this approach should be taken and the value of it, rather than what to do in the classroom. When I asked my team of ESOL tutors to complete a short questionnaire about participatory ESOL, one of their main concerns was that

they wanted to see another tutor deliver a participatory lesson, to be given resource packs to use and to see examples of learner work (see appendix 1). I was first introduced to learner-led and participatory approaches through *Reflect* ESOL training. *Reflect* is a Freirean approach to teaching which was first used by Action Aid as a tool for community development and empowerment in developing countries such as Bangladesh (Action Aid, 2009). Action Aid found that ESOL teachers were using their materials and developed some specific resources for this purpose found in the *Reflect for ESOL Resource Pack* (Cardiff, Newman and Pearce, 2009).

> *By drawing on participatory tools and methods to address teacher/learner dynamics, Reflect enables participants to bring their existing knowledge, skills and creativity into the learning process. Participants develop visual learning materials related to their own immediate experiences. The development of language skills is thus linked to practical and relevant issues that relate to real situations. Participants also gain confidence to express their own opinions and challenge injustices. By linking language learning to the analysis of broader issues in learners' lives Reflect can help bring the real world into the classroom, helping participants to develop and strengthen their language skills through practical use.* (Cardiff, Newman and Pearce, 2009, p3)

After attending a one day workshop on *Reflect* I worked with a colleague to develop and use the Reflect tools in our classes. We especially used the tree tool to help learners to shape their classes and I used such a tree for the Entry One class featured in this research. (Cardiff, Newman and Pearce, 2009:5.1). *Reflect* has been a key tool for many of my ESOL colleagues, including Sarah (see appendix 2), and like me they use it as a springboard to develop their own ideas for engaging their learners creatively; it leads teachers into working in a participatory way.

In the main texts about the subject, the content of participatory lessons is often determined by current social issues that affect learners' lives. These could be economical, political and/or educational issues such as housing legislation or local events. These issues are explored in the ESOL classroom and emerging language is then more explicitly taught as necessary. Winstanley and Cooke, in 2016, wrote a series of discussion papers on participatory ESOL and explored how themes and topics emerged

(Winstanley and Cooke, 2016:Paper 2). Working on Freirean principles they aimed to create a classroom atmosphere that facilitated the opportunities for learners to share compelling issues in their lives. Auerbach calls this *setting the tone* (Auerbach, 1992:43) and it is essential that the teacher listens actively to what the learners have to say, picking out pertinent points that can be used as themes for further exploration. It is also essential that the teacher listens to the language produced to identify what language points require further work, and recognises the knowledge each learner has, but may not be able to express easily in English.

> *Our prior experience provides the foundation for interpreting new information. No learner is a blank slate.* (Cummins, 1996:75)

In my own context, I often introduce topical content as a lesson starter. For example, the 5p plastic bag charge or the recent ban on smoking in cars when children are present. These issues affect learners' lives and they are interested to find out about such topics. However, the women I teach are usually uninvolved in, and detached from, social and political decision-making in their lives. Quite often, they appear unaware of local or national issues, and even personal issues such as their own housing situation. They are so marginalised that I am not able to explore the topics that I read about in the current texts on the subject. I prefer to take a *funds of knowledge* approach and explore the very domestic and personal worlds that my learners are immersed in. Their expertise is largely rooted in their domestic and family role, and the practices of their own social circle.

A participatory approach to ESOL is a concept that addresses not only content, but also the planning and delivery of ESOL lessons. In this method schemes of work are negotiated with the learners and are flexible, based on emergent themes and language (Cooke and Winstanley, 2016, Paper 1). I start each new ten-week block of classes by asking learners what they would like to do that term. This is usually met with very limited responses as my learners see it as my responsibility to decide what they need to know. They lack the vocabulary to describe what they are interested in, and I give examples of the sorts of topics we might cover. Consequently, some of the

content comes from my own ideas and from the exam syllabus which has a health theme. I must contrive the subject matter at times, and find ways to unlock my learners' funds of knowledge.

Participatory ESOL is light on resources and requires little pre-preparation of teaching resources. They key is to have materials for creating the right tools in response to the lead of the learners. That is not to say that it is low-tech, as access to multi-media enhances the learning experience just as it does in any teaching and learning context, but we are not dependent on access to technology. However, there is a noticeable gap in participatory ESOL research – how to use this approach with lower level ESOL learners, particularly with female basic literacy learners. Nieuwboer and Rood (2016) this gap and the challenges of using language to support integration of students who lack formal education experience.

Early in my ESOL teaching career I found that I enjoyed situations where learners told their own stories or anecdotes, but felt that it was wrong of me to allow this deviation from the intended lesson. I now know that these golden moments, as I considered them, are moments of learner agency and that I have the ability to be contingent, and to turn agency into the development of dialogue. The concepts of learner agency, and related teacher contingency, are defined and explored by Baynham (2006), Baynham, Roberts and Cooke (2006) and Baynham, Cooke and Simpson (2007).

5.2 Working with Learners' Funds of Knowledge

> *Reflect begins with respecting and valuing people's existing knowledge and experiences.* (Cardiff, Newman and Pearce, 2009, p6)

Initially I viewed *Reflect* as a way of encouraging learners to talk about 'issues' such as the always impending cuts to ESOL funding, and it certainly worked in that context. Over several years I gradually recognised the immense value of bringing (what I then called) culture into the classroom. I had written my PGCE long project on learner autonomy but at that time did not have the benefit of experience that I have now. Part of the theories about learner autonomy focus on the teacher letting go of their controlling role, and

allowing the learners to lead the lesson (Benson, 2001). When the learner has the knowledge, and is the expert in the room, the teacher has to relinquish part of their role. At times it can mean that some learners have to relinquish their role too, and allow more reticent learners to take the role of expert. This is shown in one of the interventions below – see the work with Amina in section 7.1.

Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) published *Funds of Knowledge*, a collection of research articles that explore the value and practical classroom applications of anthropological studies conducted in communities and households of immigrants in the USA. One of the key principles behind this approach is to *unlock and capitalize on the knowledge students already possess* (Gonzalez, 2009: x, preface). I keep this in my consciousness at all times in the classroom, as prior to reading Gonzelez' research I had observed how some learners, the least confident in using English, could 'come alive' and become the strongest learner in the room when the topic was one they knew. This could often be a practical task where they could excel without speaking English, but which then acted as something I could capitalise on and almost expedite their English learning.

> *The more that participants can engage and identify with the topic matter, the more interest and motivation they will have. What does not work is a top-down classroom style approach in which participants can learn methodological technique, but that strips away the multidimensionality of a personal ethnographic encounter. In other words, we learn ethnography by doing ethnography.* (Gonzalez et al, 2009:9)

This approach to using the knowledge held by learners gave me the confidence to take my approach to using learner expertise in all my classes, including when preparing them for external examinations, and motivated me to explore how it could be developed further, and confidently disseminated to other tutors.

5.3 Dialogic Teaching

In 2008 Robin Alexander wrote a short and concise text about dialogic teaching. He described authentic questions as *those for which the teacher*

has not pre-specified a particular answer. (Alexander, 2008:15). We may consider these to be open questions, but going beyond the simplicity of this we should have a clear purpose in mind when scaffolding and supporting questioning. He described five principles of dialogic teaching which are *collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful.* Dialogic teaching has the potential to empower individuals as learners, thinkers and citizens. Putting it in these terms emphasises the importance of developing dialogue, and going beyond the 'listen and repeat' transmissive style of teaching speaking skills. Alexander's theory of dialogic teaching can be followed in harmony with the principles of participatory ESOL and developing learner-led dialogue. Both have the central principle of empowering the individual and encouraging active citizenship, and in this study I have explored how learners' funds of knowledge can be unlocked to develop dialogue.

6. Ethical Concerns

There is a barrier to working with ESOL learners ethically, and that is one of language. Most of my learners do not have well-developed literacy skills in their mother tongue which means that they are unable to read information about my study. Throughout the academic year 2015-16 I have had a PhD student based in my class. She went to a huge effort to translate her ethical information and explanations of her project into the languages of the class. It was clear that they did not understand the meaning of the term **research** in any language and this had to be explained to them by one learner who did understand, and by a staff member who spoke Urdu and Panjabi. We were eventually satisfied that they did understand what she was doing and why, and could give informed consent to be audio recorded and observed at specific times and places.

> *Because the researcher is so close to the subjects of the research it follows that one of the main ethical questions posed by qualitative educational or teacher research is the researcher's responsibilities towards the subjects themselves, in our case teachers and pupils.* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989:45)

I learned from the experience with the PhD student that written translations are not helpful to my learners. I talked to the learners about my own research project and I ensured that I did this when another staff member was present. Both myself and the staff member were satisfactorily assured that the Arab and Pakistani learners gave their consent for me to observe them and make notes, to record them (but I was to say when I was doing this), and to write about them if I changed their names and the details of the class. The Oromo and Romanian learners did not have access to a speaker of their languages, and I therefore did not focus on any of their personal work or contributions. I did not have the resources and capacity to write information in the range of languages needed, and I did not want to take further time out of their four hours a week of classes to read and discuss the translations. Therefore, I decided that it was adequate for my manager to write a letter to say that she was satisfied that the learners understood and gave their consent to be included in the research. This letter is included in appendix 7. Similarly I explained to the learner in the refugee class that I was using her drawing and details of our discussion in my research.

To ensure reliability of intention and interpretation of what learners actually said and meant, I read back texts (transcriptions of short conversations for instance) to learners and asked if they were correct. This was part of normal class activities, part of the learning process, as in this way the learners would be at ease and would happily say if they thought there needed to be some clarification. This helped to ensure the reliability of the transcripts and written notes of classroom activities.

All names and locations were made anonymous as specified in the British Association of Applied Linguistics guidelines (BAAL, 2000). In addition to this some changes have been made to learner details to further assure anonymity. Staff members whose work has been referred to remain anonymous (and they gave their explicit consent to be included in the study), as does the specific service I am employed by.

7. Research Methodology

> *Action research not only researches change but also acts*
> *as an agent for the very change it is researching.*
> (Kyriacou, 2007:468)

Between 2003 and 2007 NRDC produced a series of linked effective practice studies which included ESOL teaching. The project then produced development project reports including one on the area of reflection and action in ESOL (Cooke and Roberts, 2007). This practical guide encourages ESOL teachers to form action research groups and gives a simplified structure on which to base classroom research projects. One example they give for potential research is that of speaking at the level of discourse. (Cooke and Roberts, 2007:6). It is this research that my manager referred to, regarding the need to develop speaking, which I refer to in my introduction to this study. Almost ten years later, I have observed that this remains an area of concern in the ESOL classroom, and a constant preoccupation of mine when teaching English. This practitioner guide urges us to look for a puzzle, to act on that puzzle and to analyse, explore and reflect, with a view to changing our practice (Cooke and Roberts, 2007:5). Hence, in my data collection, I have identified questions for reflection which I have tried to answer in the consequent intervention with learners, and which gave rise to further questions. I found this technique to be productive, as constantly reviewing my own questions enabled me to reflect further and to change my approach, and to ask myself how I could disseminate my results to other tutors.

Bridget Somekh identifies 8 principles of action research (Somekh, 2006:7-8). I considered the type of research I wanted to carry out and felt that I could evaluate my findings against these 8 principles, and keep them in the forefront of my thinking whilst I was engaged in collecting and analysing the data. The first principle was perhaps of the most concern:

> *Action research is conducted by a collective partnership of*
> *participants and researchers* (Somekh, 2006:7).

I was unsure of how much collaboration there could be. Collaboration requires an ability to communicate on a level that may be impossible without using interpreters and having more time to spend on what is a small-scale research project. I decided that I must continue to reflect on the power relationships, the role of the teacher, and the minimisation of contrived activities and situations. Avoiding contrived situations became a preoccupation of the research.

The third principle of Somekh's is:

> *Action research starts from a vision of social transformation*
> *and aspirations for greater social justice for all.* (Somekh, 2006:7)

This was perhaps the key underlying principle of my research and the motivation for work as an ESOL tutor and also lies at the core of the participatory ESOL pedagogy. My own personal politics leads me to social justice work (both paid and unpaid) and my vision for my learners is for them to become more active citizens, to have more control in their own lives and to be able to shape the futures of their families and communities. I work largely with women who are marginalised in many and varied ways – economically, societally, within their communities, racially and so on. I want to see them gain more power within their own families and communities, and for those communities to have more power in society generally. Improving their English proficiency, but more importantly improving their confidence and ability to use English in the most effective ways, has to be at the core of ESOL delivery. Therefore this project needs to identify how I as a teacher can do this, but also how any positive outcomes can be replicated with other learners and teachers.

Of the other six principles of Somekh's model, I feel that I can meet them in my research and they acted as helpful points to reflect on as I proceeded in my data collection and analysis. However, there is not the capacity within this project to describe that process and I am concentrating on the two points mentioned above in the writing up of the research project.

Schostak states that:

> *The domain of action research is inclusive of political action that involves the voices necessary to education that challenge the status quo and open the way for alternatives.*
> (Schostak, 2010).

My study is a small piece of research but has the potential transform my practice and that of other tutors.

> *It is not the researcher's location that affects the quality of action research, it is the careful research design, ethical sensitivity and growing expertise, as a result of reflexive inquiry into the research process rather than the application of formulaic methods.*
> (Somekh, 2006:86).

This placing of the importance on relatively small-scale and classroom-based research enabled me to see that my findings could have an implication for others outside of my own small setting. In turn this escalates the importance of considering each part of the project with care and attention, and revising it as necessary.

In addition to carrying out classroom based research, I asked tutors to complete a short questionnaire about participatory ESOL, as I wanted to know what deterred them from trying this approach. This would aid me in deciding how to share my findings and what actions to take. (See appendix 1) Also, I had a professional discussion with a tutor (Sarah) who was my PGCE mentee. The parts of this which are referred to in the study are transcribed in Appendix 2. The purpose was to consider her understanding of participatory ESOL and consider her viewpoints and motivations when analysing the work with the learner from her class.

I have used the term *second language acquisition* (SLA) in this study. This term can be seen to represent language as a thing which is acquired as separate to its use, when in fact language is a social practice. Simpson (2012) raises this and suggests that the word *development* is preferable to *acquisition* as it is about learners and the way they use language. Therefore, I have also used the term *language development* as an alternative to the more established use of SLA.

In summary, the aim of this research project is to investigate, through action research, how I can unlock learners' funds of knowledge (see section 4.1) to extend speaking skills and develop dialogue. The series of interventions I tried, focus on creating the right circumstances to encourage learner agency and to act on this agency with teacher contingency. After working with my own learners, I analyse how this approach worked with a learner I know less well (but with whom I have developed a rapport). Dissemination is a key part of the study, as I intend to share my findings with my colleagues. Therefore, I have included references to a tutor questionnaire and a professional discussion with my PGCE mentee, both of which influenced my consideration of the research questions

8. The Stages of Research Data Collection

The collection of data went through a series of stages as I tried different ways of facilitating, encouraging and enhancing learner talk in the Entry One class. I did not make finite decisions as to what strategies I would try at the start of the research project. Rather, I started with the first approach, which was based on my knowledge of the learners and their cultures, and subsequent interventions were each as a result of my reflection on the previous one. What follows is a description of three interventions, the motives for choosing that approach or task, and an analysis made at the time which informed the next step. Each intervention raised a series of questions for reflection (as referred to above), some of which motivated the next stage in the data collection and which inform my final data analysis and evaluation. I found that these questions were a significant part of the research as I tried to interrogate myself to work out exactly what it was that I wanted to know, and how would I find out the answers to my questions.

There were other interventions that I chose to reject for this study, as the ultimate focus of these was on literacy, and I chose to include three that had the main objective of developing speaking skills.

Whilst researching in my own classroom has the benefit of familiarity and of close relationships and bonds with my learners, there is a paradox in that it

can be hard to see what is before one's own eyes and to assess it objectively. Therefore, whilst I was analysing my data I aimed to take a step backwards.

> *The ethnographer working in a foreign land is attempting to make the strange familiar, while the ethnographer in local scenes must reverse the process and make the familiar strange in order to understand it.* (Mehan, 1981)

My initial proposal was to record a series of lessons where I would try to use different topics to encourage authentic speech based on learners own funds of knowledge. I had experience of this as I always try to find topics of interest in which to embed, extend and accelerate English language skills. Again, asking my learners what they wish to talk about is not always helpful, and I need to make notes as I listen to learner talk.

> *Topics are not best chosen by asking students what they want to talk about, but by listening and carrying out different activities which encourage talk.* (Winstanley and Cooke, 2016, Paper 2:5)

An important aspect of these interventions was to consider what each learner had learnt from the activity. Assessing speaking is difficult in general discussions and I had to establish what I considered to be 'learning' in the context of these interventions. I decided that learning would be any, or all, of the following:

- Participation in authentic, independently produced dialogue (not necessarily grammatically correct or standard use of English)
- Learner agency – e.g. taking the initiative to speak about a topic, contribute something additional or new, including when scaffolded by the teacher
- Demonstrating an understanding of own learning
- Independently replicating newly learnt language (a form or vocabulary), progressing towards consolidation

8.1 Constructing a Topic to Unlock Learner Funds of Knowledge
My first purposeful attempt at this was based on a recurring theme in learner discussions and which I had picked up by listening and remembering.

Whenever any learner had aches and pains, others would recommend turmeric as a remedy. I sourced a hot drink recipe that included turmeric and sounded similar to drinks my learners would describe. I rewrote the recipe in English language of the level the learners were working at. The aim was to present a reading topic that embedded E1 language points (instructional vocabulary, imperatives, a text with a purpose, healthy eating language), but also to promote discussion in which I hoped the learners would draw on their own funds of knowledge. The lesson would include the preparation of the drink, as this would assist the learning of new vocabulary, give time for processing and discussion, and add a kinaesthetic element to the lesson. My intention with this lesson was to create something similar to the *talk story* described by Mehan (1981), where a topic is chosen that the students could be expected to respond to and collaboratively produce a narrative. I had no specific ideas of how the lesson would progress but I had a basic structure in which I was willing to act contingently in response to the learners.

The exposition of the lesson was the presentation of the ingredients. Learners named the lemons, honey and ginger, followed by a more prolonged discussion on the different names for turmeric, as no-one knew the name used in English. Mother tongue was used for much of this discussion and we came up with a short list of different names and practised saying them all. Key words were written on cards, to create flashcards for use throughout the lesson.

Before presenting the recipe to the learners, I asked them what they would make with these ingredients. Immediately the idea of a drink was raised with suggested variations such as adding garlic or sugar. I expected this but did not anticipate the telling of several stories about home made 'fake tan' which had ended in orange faces and hilarious outcomes. Every learner had heard of this apart from the Romanian woman who asked questions and interacted with the other learners more than was usual for her. The laughter relaxed the learners and created a positive environment where everyone was participating.

The interesting breakthrough in this was that one woman (Amina) told a personal story of how she had been cured of a bad back with a homemade turmeric recipe. She told the story with enthusiasm despite normally being the

quietest learner in the class, who regularly fell asleep for parts of the lesson due to some difficult personal circumstances (Appendix 3).

I encouraged learners to write their own short texts about the fake tan and drinks they made at home, working in pairs to improve the texts by ordering them into instructions, or by time markers, and by checking punctuation and spelling. However, I worked with Amina, using a language experience approach to write her story about the accident that injured her back and the subsequent turmeric treatment. She used Panjabi to tell parts of this and negotiated with a Pakistani staff member to decide how to say some parts in English. Amina rarely speaks purely in her own language in class, rather translanguaging to try to use as much English as she is able to.

I transcribed this part of the lesson where Amina tells her story, and later had the Panjabi parts translated by a Pakistani tutor.

I reflected on this first part of data collection and recognised that the choice of topic had led to the engagement of all learners, with them all contributing to class discussion. Several learners had personal stories to tell and Amina in particular had contributed far more than normal for her, and had not fallen asleep for the first time in months. All learners had a written text which we used in subsequent lessons to refer back to for reading practice and for grammar, spelling and punctuation work. Amina in particular had met all four of the points I defined as evidence of learning. I had was no doubt about the value of this type of activity but several questions for reflection were raised which shaped my future research for this project.

Questions for Reflection 1:

QR1: The choice of topic was based on my experience and knowledge of working with the local community. It is specific to these female learners who are largely from Pakistan and Yemen. I knew this topic would produce useful data for my study but could I to develop this approach?

QR2: The tutors I support teach a range of learners from different cultures and places. Not all of them have my level of experience, or know enough about their learners to find topics to promote engagement and discussion

QR3: I recorded this lesson as I had intentionally chosen it to be part of my research. It is not feasible to continue to record lessons as it was intrusive to the learners. Some instances of authentic speech would happen

organically without pre-planning and I needed to use other recording methods.

QR4: One aim of my research is to empower other tutors to take a participatory approach to their teaching. I need to have more examples and try different ways of engaging learners in speaking English; ways that I can use to train and support other tutors and consequently enhance the experience for ESOL learners across our service.

QR4: Finally, was this situation too contrived, considering the first principle of Somekh's action research model which I was aiming to work to? (Somekh, 2006:7)

I concluded that I needed to avoid contrived lesson topics for the rest of the study, in order to find out how learner agency could be used to develop speaking skills, and to be able to support other tutors to learn to respond contingently. I made the decision not to record lessons and to be ready to make notes when these incidences arose.

8.2 Reacting Contingently to Learner Agency

Following this first intervention, I approached subsequent lessons with a heightened consciousness of the potential to extend learner talk by exploiting opportunities as they arose.

I attempted to avoid overly contrived situations and needed to establish how to do this, whilst at the same time recognising and valuing the transformative potential of using learner knowledge described by Gonzalez (Gonzalez et al, 2005:99). There were instances where I prompted learners and built in flexible time to develop talk where possible. I tried to facilitate questioning from the learners: questions directed at me, or at other learners. I noticed that the most enquiring questions were related to the lives of other learners, myself, and classroom visitors. Often these questions were not ones that I would ask and I recognised that the norms of questioning were culturally specific; I could not plan (contrive) questions and had to create the right conditions for learner agency.

The most notable instance of questioning was from one learner (Nadeen) to another learner (Kaltun), (Appendix 4). Alexander cites one-to-one and

collaborative questioning as providing opportunities for dialogue (Alexander, 200:40). He says that whole class talk is interactive but that interaction can be of differing qualities. Here the interaction was purposeful and met the five principles of dialogic teaching (Alexander. 2008:5). It was an example of unlocking a learner's fund of knowledge and scaffolding the development of dialogue arising from it.

Kaltun is not officially on the class register. She is partially-sighted and struggles to attend class regularly, but is welcome in class and I make adjustments to include her. Her spoken English is at a higher level than the others learners, but her literacy is weak, and further limited by her poor sight. Kaltun is older than the other learners and is treated respectfully.

In this instance we had been completing a learner handbook, which is a record of attendance and achievement that is taken from class to class and can be used a basic CV. It asks the learner to record previous work experience and it specifies that this includes work in other countries, not just the UK. Iman (student teacher) took dictation from Kaltun whose writing is too large for the handbook. All learners then read out something they had written and I encouraged questions. Kaltun read out her statement about owning her own shop in Somalia. I invited questions and was surprised at the questions asked. To me, from a western-thinking viewpoint, I initially wanted to know what type of shop it was e.g. clothes shop, food shop etc. However, Nadeen wanted to know what time Kaltun had to be at the shop in the morning, and my question was ignored so I stayed quiet. Other learners also showed interest in this topic, some of them actively listening to the questions and answers. I have observed how some learners learn as much by listening as by speaking, and aim to note down which learners do not speak in order to scaffold their learning at another stage.

> *Dialogic teaching is indicated by ……… those who are not speaking at a given time participate no less actively by listening, looking, reflecting and evaluating, and the classroom is arranged so as to encourage this.* (Alexander, 2008:42)

My twelve learners sit in a semi-circle with myself in the centre (when not circulating) which facilitates whole class participation.

I finally asked about the type of shop, and they explained that in their countries a shop is a shop, and it sells **all** things. Designated types of shop is a city phenomenon, a rich persons world, and a western idea. It explained to me the local shops in our community that seem to me to sell an unrelated and seemingly random array of items, and which I avoid going into as I am not sure what they are. Again, the learners' funds of knowledge were different to mine, and dictated the nature of the questioning. Once more the questions were of a higher level of English language than the designated level of the class and the discourse was independently produced. Discourse is defined by Cameron (2001) as language which is *used to do something and mean something and which is produced and interpreted in a real life context.* (Cameron, 2001, in Cooke and Roberts, 2007:6).

At this point I felt confident that my approach to teaching speaking skills was working. Learners were increasing in their confidence to speak English and were using higher level language to enquire about topics that they found interesting, because they were relevant to their outside world, their *funds of knowledge*. There were also more instances of learner agency and tutor contingency. For example, the completion of the handbooks was intended to be a functional task and not necessarily a speaking and listening exercise, but when the questions about Kaltun's shop arose I used my contingency to give space for learner agency.

In addition, I saw that the learners were developing the right language to help them through a forthcoming speaking and listening examination. In the above descriptions I have left out the details of how I modelled and drilled the vocabulary and grammar they needed for their questions and contributions to discussions. I was noting the language points that arose and linking back to these in future lessons to consolidate good sentence structures and grammatically-correct spoken texts. Ultimately every learner in that class passed at least one Entry 1 exam in 2015-16, a further marker of progression. A new set of questions now arose from my analysis of the shop dialogue.

Questions for Reflection 2:

QR5: I know these learners well and my success owed something to my long relationship with several of them. Teachers and learners need to establish a rapport before meaningful exchanges take place, but how

successful would this approach be if I tried it with a group of learners that I knew less well?

QR6: How was I going to involve other tutors in this research, and to disseminate my findings to enable us all to improve our teaching?

My class were accustomed to working with me and I questioned whether I was managing to *make the familiar strange*. Teachers and classes who spend a long time together *construct shared knowledge* (Wells, in Somekh & Noffke,2009), which is beneficial to the trajectory of those learners, but I needed to work with a different group to observe how my funds of knowledge approach would work with them.

The final question (QR6) became more significant when I related it to Somekh's comments about the importance of action research and its equal value with research carried out in universities.

> *It is not the researcher's location that affects the quality of action research, it is the careful research design, ethical sensitivity and growing expertise, as a result of reflexive inquiry into the research process rather than the application of formulaic methods.* (Somekh, 2006:86).

The placing of importance on relatively small-scale and classroom-based research enabled me to see that my findings could have an implication for others outside of my own small setting. In turn this escalates the importance of considering each part of the project with care and attention, and revising it as necessary.

9. A Conclusive Intervention: Analysis of Teaching and Learning in Ramadan with a Refugee Class

I chose to use a class of recently arrived refugees, taught by my PGCE mentee Sarah, because I had a rapport with them whilst not being their established teacher. The longest any of them has been in the UK is six months and they are mainly beginners of English. It is a women only class, with a men's class in the adjacent classroom, and there is some level of interaction between the two as they are mainly couples and parents/adult children.

9.1 Analysis of Working with Nora – Using her *Fund of Knowledge* to Develop Speaking in English

Nora is an older woman who came to Sheffield in late 2015 with her husband, and two of her ten (adult) children. She arrived under humanitarian protection, after living in a refugee camp for three years. I met Nora when she had been in the city for two weeks and I assessed her English proficiency. She did not speak English but from the start she stood out because she was so keen to learn, mimicking all the English she heard, despite not understanding what she was saying. Nora was immediately aware that she wanted to learn English and that she must practice in order to master it. Her husband and adult children were equally determined and they appeared to work as a team to learn English. I did not become Nora's teacher, but I closely supervised Sarah (my PGCE mentee) and I visit the class regularly.

During Ramadan 2016 I visited the class and spent time with the women. Sarah had a long roll of paper and they had decided to draw a collective timeline of a day in Ramadan. I sat next to Nora to give her some help. She had coloured pens and she wanted to draw the Suhoor meal. She started by drawing a long flat curve, from right to left, in the way that several Arabic letters are formed. In fact, I thought it was going to be a word or letter, or even a piece of Arabic calligraphy. She said something in Arabic, and tried to explain to me what it was. I think she was saying that it is like an Arabic letter but is the table. I perceived that it was intentionally like an Arabic letter and part of the design.

Nora then proceeded to draw a range of dishes in that 'letter'. There were olives, fruit, vegetables, and cheeses and dairy products. She said some of the names in English and some in Arabic. I do not speak fluent Arabic but I know a lot of food names and could translate the Arabic names to English, writing mini flashcards for all the items. Each time Nora would look at the card and say the English word several times, asking me to model the pronunciation. She then produced a handwritten glossary from her bag. It had a list of around 40 foods, each with the English word, the Arabic word, and the Arabic transliteration of the English. It was neat and organised but well worn. She had not produced this in class, but at home and of her own volition. She

added a few new words to the list, based on the ones I had written on the cards.

Nora then used the cards to label the drawing, without me suggesting she do this. My intention was for her to place the cards by the food but then save them as a learning resource to take away. We realised there were some dairy products that neither of us knew the English name for, and that probably did not have an English name. We searched for some of them using Google on my phone.

I had previous experience of Nora's dairy products. Her son had brought cheese to a picnic and told us that his mum had made it. I had also called at their family home and they invited me to drink tea. Nora had shown me that she had stuck English labels on kitchen items. She was making cheese at the time, stirring a large pan of milk on the hob. This short visit to Nora's home was imperative to me understanding her world. Jacqueline Messing writes about the importance of reciprocity, of exchanging with the learner, so that traditional hierarchical relationships are broken down. In Nora's kitchen I was able to give her more English words for her cupboards, and I took home some of her cheese, and saw how it was made. (Messing in Gonzalez et al, 2009:193).

Watching Nora draw her Suhoor meal enabled me to recognise the importance of dairy products to her. She was proud of her skills and she pointed to the cheese, making other learners look. I jokingly said to her 'you need a cow!'. Nora did not know the word cow so I showed her on the phone. 'Yes' she cried, her face lighting up. "I have. In [home country]'. I realised that of course she had a cow back home. Why else would she have these cheese and yogurt making skills? In fact cheese was her world, her expertise, and working on the Suhoor picture had unlocked this fund of knowledge.

This short episode, working with Nora, lasted about 30 minutes. Reflecting on this later, I recognised that I had become at ease in working in a participatory way and it was second nature to follow the lead of the learner. The subject matter was not contrived, and I had progressed from my first intervention with the turmeric recipe, by reflecting and analysing according to the action research structure. Although the idea for the timeline was introduced by Sarah, it was a representation of the learners' actual daily life, and she gave

them autonomy in their decision-making as to how to go about the task. We both asked authentic questions to which we genuinely did not know the answers, to progress learning and our own knowledge.

Returning to the question of agency and contingency, how much agency did Nora have in this instance? The tutor had presented the topic of Ramadan, but this was based on the fact that it was currently Ramadan and learners had wanted to continue with classes during this time. She had decided to focus on what they knew and were experiencing. Her reasoning was that the learners would have something to say about it, both to her and to each other. (Appendix 1, 2:14) She felt that learning opportunities could be developed from the activity and the learner talk. She was basing this on her own experiences, her own funds of knowledge, and her rapport with the class. Nora had decided to draw Suhoor without any lead from the tutor. In fact Sarah had wanted a chronological timeline but they had each focused on what interested them, which was largely food. They added the praying and the reading of the Qu'ran as afterthoughts, placed around the food. These learners were all women and responsible for food preparation, hence this was their fund of knowledge. Nora had beckoned me to sit with her, as we had a rapport. I had no control over how she approached the drawing or what she included. I had only commented on the progress, and encouraged her to carry on drawing. I had also supplied the English names for things, which she had not directly asked for, although she had offered some English names and I filled the gaps. I used my teacher agency here, to keep the activity linked to the development and progression of English language learning. I chose to write the nouns on small cards, adding the literacy element to Nora's spoken English. Nora chose to copy the names onto the drawing. The photograph in Appendix 5 shows the drawing at this stage.

There was a further stage of the drawing when I wrote 'This is …..' on another slightly bigger card. My intention was to move from word level to sentence level, creating a short sentence structure which could be replicated with the different nouns. Nora did not know what 'this is' meant. I said this in Arabic and modelled it with a few nouns in both Arabic and English. For instance:

Hatha zaytoun – this is olives.

Hatha shy – this is tea

Nora soon picked this up and repeated it with the other items in the drawings, with me reminding her of the pronunciation of some words. She knows how to learn a language, how to listen to the modelling and to repeat the words, creating different sentences independently once she has the structure. It is important in second language acquisition teaching to make the structures explicit, even in this less-structured context. *Raising of linguistic structures helps learners to notice language [and is] an important aspect of SLA.* (Cooke and Roberts, 2007:2). I had meant for the cards to be used to swap the nouns with the sentence starter, but Nora glued them down around the drawing. I did not intervene as this was Nora's work and she had a clear idea of what she was doing, shaping her own learning. She stretched herself intellectually and beyond her own current abilities.

9.2 Nora's Learning

One of my questions for reflection had asked if learners were learning by using the funds of knowledge approach to ESOL.

Nora fetched her husband to look at her drawing. She started to point out the different things on the drawn table, speaking in Arabic. I suggested 'tell him in English' and she proceeded with her sentences, starting with 'This is ……' and went through every item. She was able to replicate the language structure she had practised and to demonstrate it to her husband, who validated her learning with his enthusiastic responses about her English and her drawing.

I was able to assess that Nora had moved from word level to sentence level in this lesson, and that she could use the learnt language independently. Her English sentences were *emerging* and needed further practise to become *established*. This is to be expected at Nora's level of English learning.

As a teacher and researcher I learnt that Nora was learning about language learning. I am certain that she has never learnt a new language before and she went only to primary school in her own country. Her understanding of how to learn a language is based on her observations of what she has seen in class, and what her sons do. She knows to listen, to repeat, to translate and to make glossaries, and has acquired this knowledge as part of her family unit who are learning together. She has a system and she is shaping her own

learning. This empowers her as a learner, and her speaking abilities are being stretched.

> *Dialogic teaching is economic as well as effective, for at the same time as it engages pupils and advances their learning, it informs the teacher and the pupil precisely how that learning is progressing and what needs to be done to accelerate and consolidate it.* (Alexander, 2008:33)

As an individual Nora was empowered by working with her fund of knowledge (her expertise), the learning was personalised and she was aware of the way she was learning and what she needed to do to embed the new language. She was the agent in this instance and this was possible because of our rapport, and because the culture of the class was one of participation and contingent teaching.

During the time I sat with Nora, Sarah was supporting other learners in the class. As discussed in our professional discussion, Sarah owes her approach to *Reflect* training and she generally uses a creative and participatory approach with her learners. Whilst in that class I observed that Sarah manages the activities with care and discretion, allowing learners to draw on their funds of knowledge and facilitating extended speech in many instances. She responds contingently to learner agency with expertise and an open flexible approach. What Sarah does not manage so well, is the introduction of specific language points and the explicit teaching of language forms that are central to SLA classes. In order to progress as a teacher, Sarah needs the opportunity to participate in research, to investigate how her class learn, and to collaborate with other professionals to develop her practice. This relates back to the tutors' own identified needs in the survey, and informs my investigation of Q2.

10. Implications and Conclusion
Initially my research questions were clear but I was unsure of how I would answer them. I tried different approaches to explore the potential for

developing teaching of speaking in my ESOL context and these each built incrementally on the previous one, raising questions that gave rise to reflection and further planning. This followed the stages of action research described by Cooke and Roberts (2007), with each answer to a puzzle raising a further puzzle for consideration.

As a result of the series of interventions I carried out, I feel satisfied that my approach to developing speaking in ESOL is effective, and I am inspired to develop further activities to develop dialogic teaching, participatory ESOL and to continue to enable learners to produce authentic dialogue.

The funds of knowledge approach has been central to my research, and the research carried out by Gonzalez and her team (2009) has given credence and authenticity to my own natural inclination to explore the lives of my learners. Keeping that as a recurrent theme in my teaching for two terms has strengthened my classes. I used a participatory approach, which exploited learner funds of knowledge, for two terms and achieved 100% exam success for all four language skills. I am confident to take this approach to my future classes and to share it with the other tutors.

Somekh's eight core principles of action research (Somekh, 2006) were kept in my consideration throughout this study. One principle of Somekh's that I had chosen to focus on concerned social transformation and greater social justice.

> *Action researchers construct themselves as agents able*
> *to access the mechanisms of power in a social group or*
> *institution and influence the nature and direction of change.*
> (Somekh, 2006:7)

The final intervention with Nora, and the privilege of spending time in that class, enabled me to see how my role is so central to learner integration and empowerment within society. Taking a participatory and funds of knowledge approach to developing speaking has the power to transform ESOL learner's language development beyond expectations based on initial assessment levels (Q1). It will not create instant change but it can *move the change forward* (Somekh, 2006:7) and deserves further study and greater pedagogical guidance.

The other principle, of collaborative partnership working, became poignant as I reflected on the progress of the study, and relate back to Q2 concerning supporting other tutors.

The tutor team I work with had concerns about the way in which to teach in a participatory and learner-led way, which were expressed in my survey. They also had worries about meeting the needs of the exam syllabus. I can confidently guide them to embed some of these approaches in their teaching without jeopardising exam success, as my own class had a 100% pass rate across all four skills. Several tutors mentioned that they would like to observe a participatory lesson, and Sarah said that observing my lessons was an important part of her development as a tutor (Appendix 1, 2:4). Gonzalez (2005) proposes that initial teacher training should embed an empirical understanding of the life experience of students, and whilst this is not the case I can address this in my setting. Consequently, I am developing a timetable of peer observations and team teaching, with opportunities for joint reflections to develop good practice, as well as short presentations of current academic research in our tutor meetings.

To fulfil Somekh's action research principles the ESOL team needs to work collaboratively, with learners included, to explore and develop the findings of this study. I discussed with my manager, the restructuring of ESOL tutor support. She has approved the formation of a small internal research team, which can set its own action research projects to explore issues of our own choosing, starting with designating a small number of courses as participatory ESOL classes that are planned through the collaboration of learners and tutors.

I know that it is possible and probable that a collaborative action research project could decide that this participatory approach will be suitable for some teachers, with some classes, for some of the time. However, we will find new ways of working as a team and with our learners in the classroom; learners will help to shape the teaching and learning, and this has the potential to change the way we work as a service.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: survey of ESOL tutors

I had 6 completed tutor questionnaires (originals available). I have chosen to extract the answers to the questions I consider the most significant to the research. The survey was conducted before I commenced research and the questions/answers I have extracted gave rise to Question 2, and my consideration of how to disseminate my findings.
Below the summary of findings is the full (blank) survey and supporting information given to tutors.

Extracted answers from survey:

Question number	Question	Responses
2	I would like to deliver more learner led lessons, but feel I need more encouragement or support	Disagree – 4 Neutral - 2
4	Allowing learners to talk about topics that are not planned into the lesson, means that I as a tutor lose control of the class.	Strongly disagree – 1 Disagree – 1 Agree - 4
9	(Would like) packs of resources with instructions on how to use and adapt them	Strongly agree – 5 Neutral - 1
11	Practical demonstrations that show us how to deliver participatory ESOL, with clear explanations of how these meet exam requirements and elements of the core curriculum and common inspection framework	Strongly agree – 5 Neutral - 1
12	Examples of learner work from participatory lessons	Strongly agree – 2 Agree - 4

Participatory ESOL Study

I am currently conducting a small piece of research for my MA in Education at the [University name]

I am exploring participatory approaches to ESOL which can also be called a learner-led approach. This approach to teaching and learning is founded on the work of Paolo Freire, and some of you may know of Action Aid's *Reflect* ESOL project.

The key principles of participatory ESOL are to allow the learners to produce longer texts (spoken or written), which are then used to focus on gaps in language knowledge or competency. This is different to starting from a language point or aspect of grammar etc. The learners are encouraged to engage in discussion about real issues that affect them, and the tutor acts as a facilitator who then introduces and extends the language competencies.

There are academic texts written about participatory ESOL, and some examples on the *Reflect* website. However, I feel that there are very few examples of how to actually teach in this way. There is little evidence of how to use a participatory approach, but still satisfy the OFSTED common inspection framework requirements, the exam skills, SMART learning objectives and other quality requirements of ESOL providers.

I want to find out what tutors need in order to try this approach, and to record and share the methods I have tried in order to use a participatory approach in my classes. I am especially interested in entry level classes, and I am personally working with an Entry 1 class to try out a range of activities that I think embed participatory ESOL principles.

I hope that I will be able to share the resources I use, and to support tutors who wish to try a participatory approach to teaching ESOL.

It would be a great help if you could complete this short survey about participatory ESOL, whether you have already tried this type of teaching or not. Results will be kept confidential and anonymous unless you give me your specific permission to share e.g. if you tell me about some good practice that will benefit other tutors.

Thank you,
[author name]

Learner Talk Survey

Thinking about what deters you from allowing learners to engage in extended talk or discussion in the ESOL classroom, please circle the answer that best indicates how you feel about each statement.

1. I am not sure of what participatory ESOL is, or how to find out more about it.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

2. I would like to deliver more learner led lessons, but feel I need more
encouragement or support

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

4. Allowing learners to talk abut topics that are not planned into the lesson,
means that I as a tutor lose control of the class.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

5. The requirements of the exam are not being met or practised if I let learners
discuss anything that arises

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

6. I feel that it is necessary to stick to the planned activities to ensure that all
the tasks are completed and the learning outcomes are met.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

7. I don't know how to write learning outcomes that allow for extended speech
and learner led activity that may arise to unplanned topics

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

8. Learners might not feel that they have been learning if they are not
engaged in structured activities

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

**Now thinking about strategies that would encourage and support you to
build learner led lessons in to your scheme of work, please circle the
answer to indicate your response to the statement.**

9. Packs of resources with instructions on how to use and adapt them

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly
disagree

10. Templates for recording the learning that takes place

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree

11. Practical demonstrations that show us how to deliver participatory ESOL, with clear explanations of how these meet exam requirements and elements of the core curriculum and common inspection framework

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree

12. Examples of learner work from participatory lessons

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree

13. Could you give examples of times when you have used participatory approaches, if any. Please comment on what worked and what didn't work, or what the challenges were.

Appendix 2: Excerpts from Professional Discussion with Sarah (ESOL Tutor)

These 2 transcribed excerpts are from a long discussion (myself CN, and Sarah, S) about participatory ESOL in general, and an ESOL class for women who are in the UK under humanitarian protection. We refer to it as 'the refugee class' to protect their identity by not disclosing their country of origin. All names are changed.

Excerpt 1

1	Sarah	As soon as the women's class took off the approach didn't work, then it became a participatory class. I have run some women's conversation classes where the women can't read, and this approach works. Images are very strong. I showed a picture of a woman with a plaster over her mouth and they spoke so much English that I was bowled over by it. If they feel strongly about something they find something to say. They don't come to class with nothing, they come with something, and it's up to us to tap into that I suppose.
2	CN	Yes I agree.
3	Sarah	With the refugee class I find images, sensitive images, ones that aren't going to upset everyone, things they are going to have an opinion on.

Excerpt 2

1	CN	You just completed your PGCE last month.
2	Sarah	Yes
3	CN	How did you find out about this approach? What motivated you?
4	Sarah	Before I did the PGCE I went on the Reflect ESOL course. I like to take a creative approach to everything, so I went along to the Novotel, to a two day course. One thing they did was put all these images on the floor and learners

		have to pick one they like and one they don't like. And because they feel something abut it they can say something. So that was an example of and since then my resources have been ore participatory. And coming along to your classes at [name of school] and your classes were so simple but so effective.
5	CN	Oh dear! Good!
6	Sarah	I don't mean you weren't doing anything but I was exhausting myself. I realised I was doing far too much. Preparing too many resources, pre-teaching things, giving learners ideas for questions, that kind of thing.
7	CN	Yes
8	Sarah	That changed through observing you, through doing research, through experimenting and seeing what worked. And it helped doing the conversation class alongside it. I could experiment in that. Relating things to the learners' lives as much as possible. If someone came in and they were late, as is often the case, we would use that. Why were you late? We want to know? Then wonderful stories came out. We would go off on a tangent, and that is always, always okay.
9	CN	What do you think is the role of the teacher and what is the role of the learner in this sort of class? Or what is your view of yourself?
10	Sarah	That is a really, really good question. My view of my role has changed. I guess what's happening to the learner and they are getting more comfortable and not adhering to a pre-conceived idea of a learner, waiting for the teacher to approach them. They're contributing and it just comes and it's an unconscious move on the part of the learner because I've facilitated the right conditions. I find it equally exhausting teaching this way. You're actively listening and reformulating what they are saying.

11	CN	I came to your class the day you were doing the Ramadan timeline and you had a long piece of paper. Two pieces of paper in fact.
12	Sarah	It was lining paper, a long roll. This is when learners take over because they weren't doing what I intended but it doesn't matter. They were being productive. We talked about some key words such as suhoor and iftar I think. They were explaining what they meant in English and demonstrating. Nora drew her table with all her food and you were there and helped share the English words.
13	CN	What motivated you to do this activity?
14	Sarah	Because it's topical, it was Ramadan and I thought they would like to do it. I thought the women would like to see what others do in Ramadan. I know when it's Christmas I like to see what other people do, I find it exhausting and wonder what short cuts people do, and do they enjoy it? Are they tired? So I thought if that's something that stimulated conversation with my friends then it may be the same for them.
15	CN	It seems that you are saying that the conversations they have with each other are important, and not just n terms of English learning, as it might take place in mother tongue. So what English learning do you want to get out of that?
16	Sarah	I wanted to empower the women by giving them the vocabulary. They talk about food a lot and they bring in food for me and for each other. It can lead to spelling, to initial sounds, simple sentences. You can describe someone else's food. They can say what they think. You could then talk about feelings, emotions, routines – put times in.

Appendix 3: Turmeric

(Staff members in block capitals)

Utterance	Speaker	Dialogue
1	CN	I want to show you the things in the recipe to see what you can make. Say the names.
2	All	Lemons
3	CN	Lemons. How many lemons?
4	All	Five lemons
5	CN	Five lemons. We don't need all of them. There are five lemons. Five lemons.
6	All	Honey
7	CN	Honey. We call that runny honey. Runny honey. You can pour it.
8	All	Laugh.
9	All	Ginger.
10	CN	Ginger. Fresh ginger. You can also get dried ginger. This is fresh ginger.
11	All Arabic speakers	Kurkum.
12	Panjabi speaker	Haldi
13	SS	Turmeric.
14	CN	There are lots of names on the packet. Kurkum, haldi and some Indian script. In English it is called turmeric
15	All	Turmeric
16	CN	What can we make with these ingredients?
17	Aya	Salad. You can lemons in salad.
17	CN	You can put lemons in a salad. What else?
18	Aliya	A drink (others speak in agreement)
19	CN	Yes okay. You can make a drink. How would you make the drink?
20	Aliya	Erm, water.
21	Aya	Two lemons and water
22	Aliya	Two lemons, water and sugar.
23	Fazana	Sometimes not sugar, sometimes honey.
24	CN	That's a good point Fazana. She said sometimes not sugar, sometimes honey. Some times you can use honey instead of sugar.
25	Hala	What instead?
26	CN	Instead means you don't use sugar, you use honey. Instead of. Honey is sweet.
27	CN	So you would make a drink with lemons and honey. What about the ginger? Can you put the ginger in?

28	Amina	Cook it. Cook it and tea. My mother-in-law very nice tea and drink it, ginger.
29	CN	Yes. Your mother-in-law makes ginger tea?
30	Amina	Yes
31	CN	Is that with a tea bag?
32	Amina	Speaks Panjabi
33	SS (interpreting)	Yes. With a tea bag.
34	Amina	Teabag and ginger
35	CN	Is it good for something? Do you drink it when you are ill?
36	Amina	Yes
37	Duah	Says something inaudible
38	CN	What do you want to say Duah? Can we listen to Duah for a minute?
39	Duah	Speaks Arabic to Ayah (her sister).
40	Ayah	Speaks Arabic back to Duah.
41	CN	Can you tell me in English? Between you tell us in English.
42	Ayah	For a cuff.
43	Duah	Cuff. Good for cuff.
44	CN	For a cough? Yes. You can make this drink when you have a cough. What about you Hala? Do you make a drink like this when you have a cough?
45	Hala	Lemon.
46	CN	You would have lemon. What do you make with the lemon?
47	Hala	Lemon and water. Little bit of water.
48	CN	Yesterday I was looking at Facebook.
		(door opens and another learner comes in)
49	CN	Come in Maymona. Come and sit down next to Duahh.
50	Maymona	Thank you
51	CN	I want to see what Maymona has to say. I will tell you in a minute about Facebook. Maymona we were looking at these things. Everyone tell her what they are.
52	All	Honey, lemons, ginger, kurkum.
53	CN	Turmeric. They told me it is called kurkum in Arabic. We were taking about making a drink from them. Have you made a drink like this before?
54	Maymona	Yes
55	CN	When do you make this drink?
56	Maymona	Ginger with lemon.
57	CN	Yes
58	SS	Why Maymona?

59	Maymona	For flu. Very nice. And cough. Very nice for cough. It's medicine.
60	CN	A medicine. Yes.
61	All	Yes a medicine.
62	CN	It's a homemade medicine. It's not a medicine from the doctor. It's homemade.
63	Maymona	Yes make at home. And honey as well.
64	CN	And honey yes.
65	Maymona	All the time make in the morning. After er, after breakfast
66	CN	You make it in the morning. After breakfast.
67	Maymona	And we put seeds. All the time the seeds.
68	SS	Oh yes, the black seeds.
69	CN	Nigella seeds. Some people think those are very good.
70	Several learners	Yes. Very good. Black seeds.
71	CN	So yesterday I was looking at Facebook. My friend had put a recipe on facebook. She said she makes it when she has a cold. I thought the women in my class will like this. I thought they make something like this themselves and I was right. I have written the recipe on here, with a picture as well. The name of the drink, and I think it's a good name, is 'make me better morning mug'.
72	All	Laugh at the name
73	CN	Make me better morning mug. That's interesting because you said it's a medicine. Maymona said you drink it in the morning. And we have it in a mug!
74	All	Laugh
75	CN	We can make it today. It won't take long. We can taste it and say what we think. Also, it's good for you to read the recipe.
		At this point people start to look at the recipe and are reading it, some out loud so it's quite noisy. Amina starts to say something about turmeric and pain. She says some of it in Panjabi to SS who says can you tell them in English?
76	CN	Amina is going to tell us something. Can we all listen?
77	Amina	I come to Shaz (local shop). Little bit of banana you know, it's slippy. Falling down.
78	CN	On a banana skin?
79	Amina	Yeah!
80	CN	Oh no.

		Really dangerous for my back. I go to hospital. She say take tablets. My mother-in-law she say no tablets. She give me one cup milk, warm, one spoon sugar, and haldi. She say two cups day and
81	Amina	one night time. I'm sleeping.
82	CN	Okay. Amina went to the shop and she slipped on a banana.
83	All	Saying oh no but laughing.
84	CN	We're laughing but it's not funny because she hurt her back. She fell on a banana and hurt her back. You went to hospital? Remind us.
85	Amina	At night time I went to hospital.
86	CN	You went to A&E?
87	Amina	Yes. No. Hospital.
88	Amina	Speaks Urdu to SS. Then in English: I went to Northern General, Accident and Emergency.
89	SS	Yes. That's A&E.
90	Amina	I can't sleep, I can't sit, I can't lie down.
91	CN	She couldn't sleep, she couldn't sit. She couldn't lie down.
92	CN	Her mother in law made her a drink. Tell us what is in the drink
93	Amina	Milk. One spoon sugar, one spoon butter.
94	CN	Butter?
95	Amina	Yes. Butter. Teaspoon of haldi.
96	CN	A teaspoon of turmeric?
97	Amina	Yes. Turmeric.
98	Aliya	What turmeric?
99	CN	Kurkum. Turmeric in English
100	Amina	In milk.
101	CN	Was it warm milk?
102	Amina	Yes. Warm
103	PAT	Do you drink it at night? How many times do you drink it in the day?
104	Amina	One or two cups morning, one cup night time. My mother-in-law keeps saying drink it.
105	SS	We drink it. It's good for aches and pains.
106	CN	I've been to the market and at some stalls there I've seen fresh turmeric. Turmeric root.
107	All	Yes yes.
108	CN	What can I do with that?
109	Amina	Small small (mimes using a pestle and mortar)
110	CN	Crush it.
111	Maymona	You know kurkum?
112	CN	Yes. Turmeric

113	Maymona	Yes. Turmeric and honey. You can make suncream.
114	CN	Oh? Did you hear that? Maymona says you can make suncream. From ginger, honey and turmeric.
115	Maymona	No no not ginger. It looks same.
116	CN	Oh I see, fresh turmeric. It looks like ginger.
117	Maymona	Yes.
118	Aya and Aliya	Yes yes suncream
119	CN	Just a minute. Let Maymona finish telling us.
120	Maymona	Crush it. Mix it with honey and yoghurt.
121	SS	It's like a face mask. Ladies who are getting married use it and it gives you a lovely glow.
122	CN	It's like fake tan.
123	All	Lots of laughing
124	SS	In the summer, Diane who works here told me about it. I put it on, and when I took it off I was orange!
125		Lots of laughter.
126	SS	I put too much turmeric in.
127	Maymona	Yes. Too much kurkum!
128	Aya	Two days ago. I mix kurkum and honey and yoghurt and put on my face. My aunty come. She say 'why the face yellow?'
129	All	Lots of small conversations start about this. Some in English and some in Arabic.
130	Amina	Talks to SS, part in English and part Panjabi
131	SS	Shall I tell you about what Amina just told me?
132	CN	Yes please
133	SS	In Pakistan when young girls get spots on their faces they boil milk, fresh milk. Then when you leave it cool down you take the cream off the top. You take the cream off and mix it with gram flour and lemon. You leave it in the fridge to go cold then put it on your face and the spots go away.
134	Duah	What is gram flour?
135	Maymona	Chick pea. Hummus.
136	CN	Yes it's chick pea flour. Hummus in Arabic.
137	CN	This has been so interesting. Your recipes are very interesting. I think we will write your recipes, after we have made the drink. We are going to read my recipe now. Hala, please read the first part. Can everyone read and listen to Hala?

Appendix 4: Kaltun's's shop

Utterance	Speaker	Dialogue
1	CN	(*Reading out Kaltun's short written text*) I worked as a shopkeeper in Somalia
2	CN	(*to the class*) Do you want to ask Kaltun a question about that?
3	Nadeen	What time did you open the shop?
4	Kaltun	5am or sometimes 6am
5	Fazana	Very early
6	Nadeen	Why early?
7	Kaltun	In Somalia, in summer, it's hot. People do shopping early. I go home for lunch 12.00 and go to bed. Open shop again at 4.00pm
8	Nadeen	Did you live near your shop?
9	Kaltun	No
10	Nadeen	How do you get there? Walk? Bus? Taxi?
11	Kaltun	Walk. Only 10 minutes. Not far.
12	CN	What did you sell in your shop?
13	Kaltun	Clothes and some food. Lots of things.
14	Nadeen	In Yemen one shop have everything, one side clothes, one side food.
15	Kaltun	Yes, cutlery, perfume, cupboards, everything!
16	Zena	Not Libya. In Libya one shop one thing.
17	IMAN	Yes. She's right. Libya is like here.

Appendix 5: Nora's drawing of suhoor