ESOL Policy and Change Mary Hamilton and Yvonne Hillier

Britain has always had non-indigenous bi-lingual speakers of English (e.g. see Visram, 2002) Patterns of immigration have been tied to Britain's historical role as a colonialist power and to more general events in international politics. However, discussions about the language needs of these groups have been framed by strong opinions about national identity and the English language. It is clear from the historical record that ESOL, like adult literacy and numeracy, has received uneven and often unhelpful attention from government. The lobbying of what Andrea Yeatman calls "policy activists" at key moments has been extremely important (Yeatman 1998). Analysing the role of different agencies and activists contributes to our understanding about how change can happen in a field of social policy in the UK, with or without the intervention of central governments.

This article focuses on the factors affecting the development of ESOL as a field of policy and practice over the last 40 years. It sets the *Skills for Life* policy, which currently funds much ESOL provision, in a longer-term perspective and makes comparisons with the fields of adult literacy and numeracy with which ESOL is now closely linked. Rosenberg, forthcoming) provides a detailed examination of the history of ESOL and we offer here a more general analysis, based on a research project *Changing Faces* that tracked adult literacy, numeracy and ESOL from the early 1970s through to the advent of *Skills for Life*. The research comprised oral history interviews with many of the main players as well as collecting documentary evidence of policy and practice (Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). This material is now archived for future access by researchers, policy makers and practitioners (see details at the end of this article on our website and on-line catalogue).

In our research we drew upon a model of policy analysis which argues that any area of policy making deals with complex, messy situations which are often the source of conflict, tension and miscommunication among those who create and implement policies on a day-to-day basis (see Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003). ESOL is a prime example of such an issue, where the nature of what ESOL is, how it is talked about, how it is practised and how it is affected by other areas of social policy has changed over time and continues to be a contested site of public policy. In our analysis, we found five 'lenses' through which to view this messiness. Our first lens, chronology, is an overarching lens, telling the story of how ESOL originated and how it has changed over time. To extend this primary view, we have been able to use four other lenses: discourse, agency, tensions and deliberative space. We set out below our brief history of ESOL through the lens of chronology and then provide examples of how our other lenses can add depth to this account.

Chronology: A Timeline of ESOL since the 1960s

The period we cover here (see Table 1) begins in the 1960's with the first Immigration Act to allocate funding to local authorities for the needs of new immigrant communities from commonwealth countries. At the time, these communities comprised people from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent who had been actively recruited to the labour force in Britain during the 1950s. The act was also a response to the forced migration of

East African Asians from Uganda in the 1960s. The home office funding (which came to be known as "Section 11") was to support general settlement needs but a large proportion of it was used for English language training, for both adults and children. Subsequent legislation re-drew the boundaries of who could qualify for Section 11 funding as new groups arrived from areas of world conflict: from Latin America and Vietnam in the 1970s, latterly from Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Section 11 funding continued for 3 decades until 1998 when it was replaced by the Ethnic Minority Student Achievement Grant in England administered through the Learning Skills Council.

Like adult literacy and numeracy, ESOL provision was originally staffed by volunteers and today teachers continue to be in largely part-time, marginal posts. Short-term, erratic project funding has been the norm for much of the period we studied, funded by a variety of sources and centred on local community groups, family learning and workplaces. The European Union provided much specific project funding over the years, from its funds for migrants and women and for unemployed adults through the MSC. As provision became established in further education colleges, close links with local ethnic minority groups were acknowledged as being essential to good practice, along with the other state agencies responsible for settling newcomers, such as housing departments.

As our timeline shows, there have been a variety of influences on ESOL provision relating to government initiatives and legislation. There have been 'key moments' in this history. For example, in 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act resulted in literacy, numeracy and ESOL provision being .classified as vocational courses that qualified for funded from the Further Education Funding Council. Community-based funding struggled to keep afloat with much reduced Section 11 funding through the LEAs (Rosenberg, forthcoming). When ESOL became incorporated into *Skills for Life*, staff were required to undertake teaching qualifications and learners were expected to gain qualifications in language which had been specified in a national curriculum. As for literacy and numeracy, this represented a big shift from earlier learner-centred approaches to curriculum development. ESOL has become, over time, subsumed into a more generic umbrella of 'basic skills' whilst it has preserved its identity through agreement of discrete standards.

ESOL was not included in the 1975 *Right to Read* literacy campaign and for many years, it had no representation at national policy level. In 1984, however, the remit of the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) was extended to include ESOL and from then until the present, the fate of ESOL has been yoked with adult literacy and numeracy within national policy in England and Wales. ALBSU was unable to improve ESOL provision much over the next 15 years, but it did publish some reports pointing out the need for development (see Basic Skills Agency, 1996). It carried out a survey in 1989 estimating that half a million potential ESOL learners existed in England and Wales ALBSU, 1989). It managed to get ESOL, along with Literacy and Numeracy included in the Schedule 2 list of courses that ensured statutory funding from the FEFC in the 1990s (DfES, 1992).

Agency: How Change has happened in ESOL. A field of social policy is not fixed but created by the actors who engage with it. In the *Changing Faces* project we looked for the actors at international, national, regional and local levels who have made a difference to ESOL. Many of these overlap with adult literacy and numeracy but a there are distinctive agents as well, linked to the worlds of immigration and racial equality, such as the home office, the immigration service, the Commission for Racial Equality and local Community Relations Councils.

One of the big differences between Adult literacy and Numeracy, and ESOL is that though access for particular target groups, such as Asian women, has been difficult, ESOL has been largely demand-led (See ACACE, 1979, Appendix 1). Even with the expansion of provision under *Skills for Life*, there are long waiting lists for ESOL classes though we are not aware of organized lobbying actions by ESOL learners.

Many of our interviewees recalled how provision in the 1960s and 70s was largely developed by local practitioner activists, frequently in people's homes or in local adult community settings (as in Ruth Heyman's neighbourhood classes begun in London and as documented by Jean Brown in Leicester (see Brown, 1985). Voluntary organizations and Local Education Authorities (LEA)s provided funding and provision varied according to the uneven concentration of ethnic minority populations around the UK and the vision of local agencies. London, through the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), was a leading ESOL provider throughout the period and, in line with its early commitment to lifelong learning and community education, supported much innovative practice. At the start, secondary school materials (SCOPE) developed by a national development organization, the Schools Council, were adapted for use with adults. Materials and training were also developed locally, often by practitioners themselves and though project funding, for example the *Home Tuition Kit* produced by the CRE (CRE, 1977).

We have mentioned above the rather ineffectual role of ALBSU/BSA in relation to ESOL. In the absence of effective national government co-ordination and policy presence two organizations have played especially prominent activist roles in ESOL. These are NATECLA, The National Association of Teachers for English and Community Languages to Adults, a membership practitioner organization founded in 1985 (Rosenberg and Hallgarten, 1985) and the Language and Literacy unit, now known as LLU+ and originally set up in 1980 by the ILEA with joint co-ordinators for literacy and ESOL work. NATECLA has played a number of key roles in training teachers, promoting public awareness, research and policy lobbying. Key moments have included intervening in professional development and funding changes in the 1990s, and lobbying for a separate ESOL core curriculum in Skills for Life (DfEE, 2000). The Language and Literacy Unit, (LLU) has been consistently on the cutting edge of innovative practice, developing materials and teacher training and actively promoting links between the fields of literacy, language and numeracy and specific learning difficulties. With the declining role of the BSA in recent years, NIACE has also been an active presence in the field (see for example NIACE, 2006)

International players have also been important. ESOL practitioners and researchers have always had much stronger international links than those working in literacy and numeracy. Ironically, however, bilingual speakers were totally invisible in the standard test for English literacy used in the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The results of the IALS have been the justification for subsequent basic skills policies in a number of OECD countries, including *Skills for Life*. and thus opened up opportunities for the current funding of ESOL as an aspect of basic skills (OECD, 1997; Moser 1999).

Discourse: Ways of Talking about ESOL Public discourses frame and stabilise the 'problem' of ESOL. At every point a number of co-existing discourses can be distinguished, woven through the narratives of documents and respondents, depending on their position in the field. Some are hidden and marginalized, whilst others become part of the dominant received wisdom of the day. A key example is the current characterization of ESOL as a "basic skill" within Skills for Life is a discourse move that has had powerful effects in linking ESOL with ALN. Another example is the fact that, for many years, funding for ESOL came from the Home Office rather than the Department for Education and Science (DES), with the result that it was treated as a social "problem" resulting from immigration rather than primarily as an educational issue. This framing of ESOL as an immigration issue affected the boundaries of who can be served by it the politics of public responses to it.

Like adult literacy and numeracy, ESOL has had to establish itself as a distinctive area of provision. In particular it has had to distinguish itself from the internationally established field of EFL training, define its own boundaries and distinctiveness. ESOL has traditionally had a close relationship with EFL and has struggled to establish itself as a distinct specialist whilst drawing on the benefits and shared approaches of an established framework of underlying principles and theories of language learning and teaching, professional qualifications and international links.

There are still debates about the naming of the field, and it has been variously referred to ESL/EFL/EAL and ESOL. In some respects, there has been more stability than change in ESOL policy discourse because of entrenched public attitudes towards immigration. Within this view, ESOL is seen as a compensatory education programme to aid the assimilation of immigrant communities into what is perceived as a traditionally monocultural, monolinguistic heritage. This has been a very powerful trend in the British Education System and that is challenged by the alternative discourses of integration, multi-culturalism and anti-racism. Within the dominant public discourse, however, bilingual adults and their children are still pathologised and treated as deficient rather than a resource.

The role of student writing and publishing was a significant innovation in adult literacy (Mace, 1995) and ESOL, has also promoted student voices in order to make visible the complexities and diversity of learners' identities to counteract stereotypes (see for example Wilson, 1978; NEC, 1979 and many local publications).

Funding until the early '90s was restricted to immigrant groups from the new commonwealth and so did not cover many ESOL groups who arguably had equal or greater language needs (such as those from Eastern Europe or Vietnamese refugees). LEAs were not encouraged to make provision through their mainstream education budgets for bilingual learners (Hartley 1992). The literacy needs of speakers of minority dialects, such as Afro-Caribbean adults were addressed neither by national ESOL funding nor by mainstream literacy programmes. This framing also made indigenous bilingual groups invisible. The Welsh bilingualism policy, for example, and wider issues about linguistic pluralism are bracketed off from ESOL by this framing. in contrast, for example, to the Australian Language and Literacy Policy of the 1980s-90s that deliberately brought such issues together (Lo Bianco and Wickert, 2001).

Tensions: Enduring Struggles in ESOL – Some key issues involved in the dynamic of ESOL are constantly debated and never satisfactorily resolved. The relationship between ESOL and EFL, discussed above, is one such issue. Our interviews surfaced moments of conflict and stories of how these tensions have been managed. Sometimes iconic events, people or publications became a particular focus for these, as for example the achievement of a core curriculum for ESOL under *Skills for Life*. A key tension that ESOL shares with literacy and numeracy is the balance to be struck between a learner-centred negotiated pedagogy and the more top-down standardized approach favoured by current policy.

As we have seen above, the way in which ESOL has also been defined as a basic skill, along with literacy and numeracy (and now ICT) has brought particular tensions. Specific recurring issues are the way that this positioning ignores the diversity of ESOL learners' education backgrounds, especially those who are highly educated, and the need to insist on pedagogies that deal with oral as well as written language because of the concerns of the more powerful field of literacy tend to dominate.

A further tension exists around attitudes to bilingualism, and whether programmes should teach English only or also mother-tongue languages. ESOL teachers have to work within a cultural and political climate that is marked by racism and xenophobic attitudes towards newcomers, a poorly informed public and the symbolic value of Standard English within debates about national identity. Within mainstream policy and provision the aim has only ever been for adults to learn the English language and mother tongue and bilingual programmes have never officially been sanctioned and funded.

ESOL teachers face a dilemma that is also familiar to literacy and numeracy practitioners about the boundaries of their role. Should ESOL be just concerned with formal language needs, or as sometimes the only sustained point of contact that learners have with the host community, should programmes be dealing with the cultural and material settlement issues faced by new immigrants as well (see NIACE, 2006). This dilemma is made more acute by government policies of dispersal, first tried with the arrival of the Vietnamese boat-people in the 1970s and now a policy of the labour administration since the 1990s. ESOL provision experiences particular tensions because of the lack of community support and expertise in areas with traditionally low immigrant populations.

Deliberative space: Who gets heard in debates about ESOL? This section refers to the opportunities for interested parties, whether policy actors, learners, managers, practitioners or employers, to contribute in a representative way to debates forming policy and practice and thereby to assert their perspective within the policy process. Different policy regimes vary in how open they are in this respect.

Elsewhere we have argued that ALNE generally has experienced few such opportunities during its formative years although policy activists at all levels have constantly sought informal ways to influence the development of the field sometimes with notable success (See Hamilton and Hillier, 2006). If Adult literacy has been marginal, then ESOL has been even more so and numeracy most invisible of all. The formal space for contributing to policy strategy has been extremely limited. However, practitioner driven organizations like NATECLA and the LLU have been very influential at key moments in advocating for the field generally, the professional development of practitioners and for effective policy responses. The history of ESOL has been marked by energetic, politically astute and theoretically sophisticated activists, who have been able to draw on international experience and the more formally and academically rooted world of EFL. In this respect, adult literacy and numeracy in the UK have a good deal to learn from ESOL.

Achievements to Remember

When a new policy strategy enters there is a tendency for earlier work to be forgotten, especially where it was not nationally visible or publicly documented. There are many examples of good practice that can be recovered from the historical record. The Industrial Language Training Programme (see Jupp and Hodlin, 1975; Roberts et al, 1992; Roberts, 2005) offered ESOL training and multi-cultural awareness training to managers and employees throughout the 1970s and 80s. Started through Section 11 and urban aid funding to the local authorities in 1974 it was extended through the MSC, with European money. It was well-informed by principles of applied linguistics, and took seriously the wider cultural and political issues of racism and diversity. It promoted not just English lessons, but cross-cultural training and language awareness for employers and all employees. It remains a major reservoir of knowledge for workplace learning but is little known by current policy-makers and practitioners.

The mass media have contributed significantly to ESOL across the years. In 1977, the BBC followed its high profile literacy campaign, *On the Move*, with *Parosi*, aimed at Asian women, and went on to produce other programmes dealing with both community and workplace language issues (see Shahnaz and Hamilton, 2005). These included *Crosstalk* (Gumperz et al 1979), about workplace communication, in collaboration with the ILTU, *Speak for Yourself* and *Switch on to English*. All included workbooks and handbooks for teachers.

Some well-documented examples of bilingual literacy work were funded outside of Section 11 funding. Projects on Afro-Caribbean language and literacy were carried out by the ILEA Language and Literacy unit and by the LEA in Manchester. These challenged

the boundaries of ESOL and brought issues of language variety to the centre of literacy teaching and learning to the benefit of both ESOL and literacy work. They have left valuable archive records (see Craven and Jackson, 1986; Harris, 1979; Schwab and Stone, 1987 and see also the Kweyol project (Morris and Nwenmely, 1994))

The Sheffield Black Literacy project, supported by the local authority, was just one exemplary initiative that worked closely with local ethnic minority communities to develop bilingual programmes and to engage members of those communities in volunteering and teaching in the programmes (see Gurnah, 1992; the RaPAL Bulletin Issue 25, Autumn 1994 and Rees et al, 1981). Since mainstream funding never supported bilingual tuition, such initiatives were usually scattered and short-lived, dependent on one-off project funding and they are scattered with little visibility across the historical record.

Embedded approaches in adult ESOL have never been the norm except within the work of the ILTU. However, these were also trialled in this earlier period, through projects like the LLUs *Linked Skills* showing how ESOL (as well as literacy and numeracy) could be supported within the context of a range of skills and crafts.

Much good practice and innovation in ESOL was tied to new demands as new population groups arrived (see, for example, Rosenberg, 1982, reporting on the Vietnamese project). ESOL practitioners developed flexible responses and this store of knowledge is an important resource to the field as ESOL continues to change with new arrivals from Eastern Europe.

Some Conclusions

The history of ESOL over the last 40 years has had an uneasy relationship with adult literacy and numeracy and the current funding of it under the umbrella of *Skills For Life* is just the latest stage of this. Like ALN, it has had to establish itself as a credible field of practice, to repeatedly demonstrate the need to policymakers, and to struggle with negative public stereotypes of learners. Many of the agencies that have supported ESOL, like the BBC, the National Extension College and the local authorities, have also played a key role for adult literacy and numeracy.

However, unlike adult literacy, ESOL has never had a national agency dedicated to promoting its interests and the ALBSU, when it was responsible for ESOL, had very limited success in improving provision. ESOL was not mentioned in the 1973 Russell Report on adult education. It was not included in the *Right to Read* literacy campaign of the 1970s and neither were bilingual learners addressed as a distinct group in the recommendations from the Moser report 25 years later. This was despite an increasingly diverse multi-lingual population and a long history of demand-led provision for English teaching.

In the absence of a secure and affirmative policy climate for promoting ESOL, perhaps the link with literacy and numeracy prevents ghettoisation and has more benefits than disadvantages, but anomalies abound. The range of people served by ESOL classes is very different from literacy and numeracy; their patterns of participation and immediate vocational and community needs are also different (Schellekens, 2001; KPMG, 2005). The pedagogical practices, record-keeping and tests of achievement that are appropriate when teaching oral as well as written language, are also different. Within *Skills for Life*, (where ESOL learners make up half of the student population) this situation has been acknowledged through the development of a separate curriculum for ESOL, largely the achievement of the NATECLA and other activists. It has also been documented through the research and development work of the NRDC (see Barton and Pitt, 2003, Baynham et al 2007; Heathcote et al, 2003; Pitt 2005; Roberts et al, 2004;). However, national policy frequently overrides these insights, and current efforts to reduce public funding for ESOL by requiring key groups of ESOL learners to pay for classes shows how vulnerable ESOL provision can be when uncoupled from a public perception of basic need (see Learning Skills Council, 2006).

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The big drivers of ESOL policy are still public attitudes towards immigration and government expediency in managing these. Lessons from earlier experiments with provision get lost over the years and there is constant re-invention of the wheel. At the same time, each new wave of immigration to the UK brings new challenges and importantly, new opportunities. There will continue to be a key role for practitioners and other key activists, including organizations like NATECLA and the LLU as deliberative spaces for debate, formulation of new ideas and for monitoring and critiquing government responses. A sense of history can be a good aid to activists, offering signposts to effective decisions about how and where to intervene in the field in the future.

Word count 3926

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http://www.literacy.lancaster.ac.uk/links/changingfaces.htm

Table 1: ESOL timeline of significant events

Section 11 of the Local Government Act provided ESOL funding for the first time
Immigration Act. Created concept of "the right of abode".
UK joins the European Union – Social Funding available
Expulsion of Asians from Uganda
Immigration Act
Military junta under General Pinochet takes power in Chile
Manpower Services Commission created (MSC)
Russell Report on Adult Education
British Association of Settlements Conference launches the <i>Right to Read</i> manifesto
Industrial Language Training Unit formed, as one of the MSC's first projects, promoting ESOL in
the workplace
Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge take power in Cambodia
Fall of Saigon: Boat People arrive First ESOL teachers' course at Westminster College TESLFACE Bullock Report: A Language for
Life
BBC screens On The Move Associated with the literacy campaign
Adult Literacy Resource Agency (ALRA) established, initially for one year to support the
development of literacy provision in Local Authorities and voluntary organisations.
The great Debate: Callaghan's Ruskin Speech
Race Relations Act
ILEA sets up the London Language and Literacy Unit
ILEA appoints first Borough Language Co-ordinators
Home Tutor Kit CRE
BBC screens <i>Parosi</i> An introduction to teaching English at home
Foundation Conference of NATESLA
All Local Authorities had appointed full and/or part time organizers for basic skills
Cross talk BBC based on work of ILTU
Margaret Thatcher accepts 10,000 Vietnamese from Hong Kong ALBSU formed, replacing ALU. Numeracy part of basic skills remit for first time
Speak for yourself BBC series and accompanying booklet
Rampton Report
Vietnamese Project
National tutor training
NATESLA publishes Catalogue of resources
Linked Skills. A handbook for skills and ESL tutors NEC
RSA ESOL Profile Certificate run nationally
ALBSU takes over remit for ESOL nationally
Swann Report: Education for all
Membership organization National Association of Teachers of English as a Second Language to
Adults (NATESLA) formed (Later called NATECLA)
Research and Practice in Adult Literacy (RaPAL) formed same year Education Act
Autumn, First issue of <i>Language Issues</i> (NATECLA)
Immigration Act
Education Reform Act (introduced national curriculum in schools)
ILEA Abolished
BBC and ALBSU launch the Basic skills accreditation initiative
Language and Power. ILEA Afro-Caribbean Language and Literacy Project in FE/AE UNESCO
International Literacy Year. Beginning of the break-up of the Soviet Union. Break-up of Yugoslavia
Civil war in Somalia

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1991	NATECLA sets up teacher training working party
1992	The Further and Higher Education Act followed by creation of FEFC and an inspectorate with a
	basic education team. Basic Skills included under Schedule 2
	ALBSU Regional training programme ceases.
1993	Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act
	Section 11: definition widened to cover all ethnic minorities Education Act NATECLA takes over TESLFACE and Cert TESLA from RSA
1995	
1996	Asylum and Immigration Act
1997	Education (Schools) Bill
	UK comes bottom of an International Numeracy Survey of developed countries. BBC runs a new
	series "Count on me" to address this issue and BSA runs Family Numeracy Pilot Projects. National Literacy Strategy launched
1000	Immigration and Asylum Act .Stephen Lawrence Inquiry
1999	A Fresh Start: <i>Improving literacy and numeracy.</i> Report of working group.(Moser) DfES
2000	Breaking the Language Barriers DfES
2001	Skills for life strategy sets target for 2004. Creates new Adult Basic Skills Strategy Unit in the
2001	DfEE.
	Adult Literacy Core Curriculum DfES/Basic Skills Agency
	Adult ESOL Core Curriculum. DfFES/Basic Skills Agency
2002	Consultation on ESOL Subject Specifications
2002	Changing Faces Project
	Materials development Projects
	National Research and Development Centre established
2004	Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and
2004	Slovenia join EU on May 1
2005	, ,
2005	New Citizenship Test introduced
2006	NIACE Enquiry into ESOL "More Than a Language"
	LSC announces end of free ESOL classes for asylum seekers

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