The politics of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages): implications for citizenship and social justice

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Abstract

A number of countries in Europe, including the UK, have adopted language or citizenship tests or courses as a requirement for granting citizenship to migrants. To acquire citizenship, migrants to the UK must pass a test on British society and culture or demonstrate progress in the English language. For those with an insufficient command of the language, there is the option in the UK of taking an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) with citizenship course. These citizenship and language tests and courses are seen by governments as a way of encouraging migrants to develop the competences believed necessary for social integration. Equally, these are seen as a means for migrants to demonstrate their willingness to integrate. However, two types of criticisms have been made against compulsory tests and language programmes. The first questions the need for citizenship tests or compulsory language and citizenship courses. The second relates to whether such tests and courses are a genuine contribution to preparation for citizenship or whether these, in effect, constitute a gatekeeping mechanism. There are also issues of funding.

This paper presents the results of a study of a Skills for Life ESOL course at a community college in London that is specifically intended to help migrants seeking to qualify for British citizenship. Interviews were carried out with staff involved in ESOL at the college, and a focus group discussion was also conducted with a student group. The aim of the paper is to provide an account of the experiences of the students in the light of the criticisms that have been made of requirements to demonstrate progress in language competence or sit a citizenship test in order to achieve citizenship by naturalisation. We also examine the impact of policy changes, including funding cuts, on the college and students. Although we

found the language and citizenship class to be a positive experience, we also note inconsistencies and contradictions in policies and discourses around language.

Key words:

Citizenship, language test, citizenship test, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), integration

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Introduction

The UK Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act of 2002 introduced a system of testing migrants wishing to settle in the UK. It required those applying for naturalisation as British citizens - and from 2007 those applying for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) - to pass a test. Since 2004, migrants with good language skills have had to demonstrate knowledge of the content of an official publication (Home Office 2004) by answering somewhat arcane multiple-choice questions on a computer about life in the UK. Those with less confidence in English may instead offer proof that they have made progress in their language competence by taking an ESOL course with elements of citizenship in it.

Blackledge (2006a) traces the development of the discourse underlying government policy from concern about social unrest in northern towns to the identification of poor language and citizenship skills as a threat to national cohesion and national security. ESOL classes may be considered as the front line of government security policy. The investigation of implications on the ground of this sudden politicisation of what had been relatively low status courses provided by local further education colleges suggested itself as one of a number of case studies undertaken for a European project on citizenship and lifelong learning[1]. In the summer of 2007, we carried out a study of one such ESOL course at a community college in London. This paper presents the background to the course and explores a number of issues related to citizenship and social justice.

Background

[1] The team from the Institute of Education, University of London, was funded under the EC Socrates-Grundtvig scheme for the project 'Stocktaking Study on Lifelong Learning for Democratic Citizenship through Adult Education'.

At the turn of the 21st century, a series of events led the British government to become increasingly concerned with the integration of migrants and ethnic and religious minorities in the UK. The first of these was the disturbances in Northern cities of Bradford, Oldham and Burnley in 2001, involving 'large numbers of people from different cultural backgrounds' (Cantle 2001: 1). The Community Cohesion Review led by Ted Cantle, set up as a result, noted the way in which extremist groups like the British National Party and the National Front were able to stir 'strong feelings of anger and concern within the younger minority ethnic community' (Cantle 2001: 60). Cantle noted that 'community cohesion fundamentally depend(ed) on people and their values', and proposed strategies to make migrant communities feel 'at home', including an agreement on 'some common elements of "nationhood"' (Cantle 2001: 18). Among other things, there was 'the expectation that the use of the English language, which (was) already a pre-condition of citizenship… (would) become more rigorously pursued, with appropriate support' (Cantle 2001: 19).

Critics of the Cantle report have pointed out that those involved in the unrest in the northern towns spoke English as their first language, so the recommendation of the need to accept the English language was difficult to understand. Indeed, Tomlinson, commenting on the requirement that migrants should accept local norms, observed that there was a conflation of 'the presence of long-standing minority citizens with newer migrants and refugees' (Tomlinson 2008: 135). Hence, Cantle's recommendations for more rigour in the English speaking policy do not logically follow from the analysis in the report, and perhaps more political considerations were in play. There also exists a body of work that challenges the notion that values and language were the primary causes of unrest and social segregation, pointing instead to racism, discrimination, poverty, housing, unemployment, education policies, and class (see, for instance, Tomlinson 2008). In fairness to Cantle, his proposal of the 'universal acceptance of English' was one among a number of recommendations to address social segregation which included anti-discrimination measures, cross cultural contact, community cohesion strategies, and regeneration

strategies. Whatever the case may be, his recommendation regarding the use of the English language has been the driver for current policy with respect to ESOL and integration.

Following the Cantle report, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002) was passed, requiring residents seeking to be naturalised to 'show a sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic', and to have 'a sufficient knowledge about life in the UK' (Home Office 2003: 3). In the same year, a group headed by Bernard Crick was set up to advise the Home Secretary on the Life in the UK test, and to define what would constitute 'sufficient' language ability and knowledge of UK society and institutions.

In his report, Crick presented the UK as a multicultural society under 'a framework of common civic values and common legal and political institutions', and proposed that all citizens needed to 'accommodate the new and the old' by living up to 'the best and generally accepted elements in the political traditions and values of the United Kingdom and the democratic practices of free citizenship' (Home Office 2003: 10, 11). Crick identified the use of English as 'possibly the most important means of diverse communities participating in a common culture with key values in common' (Home Office 2003: 11). Hence, the mastery of English meant more than its practical use for work and in everyday life; for Crick, language enabled migrants to participate in a common culture, and was essential in the process of integration.

Crick's advisory group also saw the acquisition of practical information about life and active citizenship in the UK as being a priority for migrants. It therefore recommended unified 'language-with-civic-content' programmes (Home Office 2003: 14). These programmes would be 'comprehensive but flexible', and would lead 'not only to formal, legal citizenship but also focus at every level on what people need to settle in and begin to be equipped to be citizens in the full sense' (Home Office 2003: 13).

The result was that many migrants seeking to be naturalised now have to demonstrate knowledge of life in the UK by taking a computer-based multiple-choice test in

English. Theoretically it is possible to use Welsh or Scottish Gaelic instead, although there is little information on the numbers actually availing themselves of this option. Indeed the option to use these official languages of Scotland and Wales, clearly included to placate the nationalist parties, is evidence of a confused policy. The apparent acceptance of multilingualism in these very particular situations is contradicted by other very strong discourses on the primacy of English (Cooke 2009).

When it comes to qualifying for citizenship, those whose level of English is lower than the ESOL Entry 3 needed for the test have to attend combined ESOL and citizenship classes (Border and Immigration Agency n.d.). The requirement of the language and citizenship test or course was subsequently extended to those applying for settlement, or Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR). Official sources emphasise that this requirement is not intended to create hurdles to acquiring citizenship, but to 'stimulate integration and civic participation as well as constitute proof that those processes are taking place to existing citizens' (Goldsmith 2008: 116). This claim will be explored in greater detail later in the paper.

The UK is not the only European country to have adopted citizenship and language tests or courses for migrants as a condition for entry, settlement, or naturalisation. A number of other EU states (or sub-national administrative regions within these) have done so as well, including Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, and the Netherlands (Glastra and Schedler 2004; Jacobs and Rea 2007; Joppke 2007; Hofhansel 2008; McNamara and Shohamy 2008). Examining citizenship tests in EU countries and the USA, Etzioni argues that these tests 'have been shown to serve primarily as immigration control measures rather than as significant tools for preparation for citizenship' (2007: 356).

The next section will look at the issues surrounding language and citizenship tests.

Language and citizenship tests

In introducing language tests and courses, and making the granting of settlement and naturalisation conditional on these, governments emphasize the role of language in enabling migrants to integrate into society. Cooke (2009) characterises this as a liberal perspective, as propounded by the Life in the UK Advisory Group (Home Office 2003; Kiwan 2008). In fact there is a broad consensus around the importance of communication skills in English, with migrants often basing their choice of country of settlement on the basis of perceived opportunities to learn what they see as the predominant language of the world (Home Office 2003; Baynham *et al*. 2007).

However, language tests and courses perform social functions as well. Milani notes, for instance, how those working in the area of Language Ideology regard language as being both the medium and the object of 'discourses through which the social order is produced, reproduced, or contested' (Milani 2008: 33). In this perspective, language tests have symbolic power 'in their ability to shape social categorization not only in terms of the criteria of inclusion and exclusion (who is to take a test or not, who passes or fails a test, etc.) but also in terms of the values attached to such categories' (Milani 2008: 33). In other words, language tests are not value-neutral. They contain assumptions, values, and ideologies which may, in turn, lead to unjust outcomes.

In the view of critics such as Blackledge, language tests are 'a new gatekeeping mechanism… potentially preventing a group of willing residents from participating in the democratic process, and from accessing their rights' (2006a: 27). Blackledge points to the extension of language testing to spouses of citizens, a requirement that largely affects British Asians. For McNamara and Shohamy, such tests violate 'the right of people to use their (own) language', and the refusal to grant citizenship for reasons of language competence is also 'a violation of basic human/personal rights to welfare, education and other social benefits' (McNamara and Shohamy 2008: 93). The point here is that if, as Osler argues (2009), the tests are designed to delay access to rights and benefits, they are indeed

discriminatory. Although the evidence for this is circumstantial, and therefore deniable, it is nonetheless powerful.

McNamara and Shohamy (2008: 91) note that the introduction of language and citizenship tests coincides with 'the growth of ethnic diversity, internal ethnic tensions, and the emergence of the discourses of homeland and border security and national identity as a protection against external terrorist threat'. As was noted earlier, English language had been a pre-condition of citizenship prior to the security threats that emerged in the new millennium. However, this took new form and emphasis in the language and citizenship tests that were introduced at a time where there were not only security concerns, but also concerns about immigration, integration, and social cohesion (Osler 2009), and suggests a link between the two.

The arguments made by critics against citizenship tests may also be applied to language courses where these are compulsory for settlement or citizenship. The end of course test constitutes a hurdle that migrants have to cross and, hence, potentially poses an obstacle to them accessing rights and benefits. This issue is explored in the penultimate section of this paper.

Case study of an ESOL with citizenship course at a community college in London

We identified a community college in London as being typical in offering ESOL with citizenship courses for people living in the area. Located in East London, the London Community College[2] serves a population that includes migrants from Asia, Turkey and the Middle East, South America, Africa, as well as other EU member states, as do many colleges in and around London.

Methodology

[2]We have changed the name of the college to protect the privacy of the individuals we interviewed.

Initially we carried out a document analysis of the course description and teaching material used for the ESOL course at London Community College. The citizenship content of the ESOL lessons is determined by Government-funded materials that are widely used (NIACE/LLU+ 2005). Emphasis is placed on enabling migrants to engage with the welfare and health services and the education system, and generally adapt to life in the UK. While many of these elements are covered in any ESOL course, citizenship is the perspective through which these are viewed. And students are taught a vocabulary for citizenship (including community, respect, freedom, diversity, justice), and about becoming and being a citizen in the UK[3].

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the Assistant Director of Curriculum who was responsible for Skills for Life (including ESOL), the Head of ESOL, and a lecturer of ESOL. We observed a class entitled 'Women into College' which was made up of female students, and was taught by a female lecturer. This arrangement catered for the cultural and religious needs of women who, according to our informant, 'might not be comfortable in classes with other male students or a male teacher' (ESOL lecturer). Following the class we organised a focus group discussion, again using a semi-structured question schedule. Of the twelve students who attended the lesson, eight participated in the discussion. These students came from Somalia, Eritrea, Turkey, and Portugal, and were five months into a one year ESOL course. While not all the students wanted to apply for settlement or naturalization, since EU citizens are already entitled to live and work in the UK, all the non-European students present indicated a wish to do so.

In this single case study we can only hope to illuminate and inform some aspects of the debates about tests and courses for migrants. Our findings suggest that neither students nor teachers challenge the liberal discourse since they appear to be accepting of the situation in which they find themselves.

[3] See the first chapter, 'What is citizenship?', of *Citizenship materials of ESOL learners* (NIACE/LLU+ 2005)

Findings

In this section, we report on the motivation of the ESOL students at London Community College for enrolling on the course as perceived by their teachers and as expressed directly to us. We also analyse accounts of the effect it had on them. A further issue raised by the staff is the impact on the college and students of the changes to ESOL funding announced in 2007.

Staff perceptions of students' motivation for ESOL classes

According to staff at London Community College, the motivation and goals of ESOL students ranged widely. The Assistant Director of Curriculum and the Head of ESOL asserted that there were those who took a purely instrumental approach and studied English because they needed it 'to live in England'. This could mean either that they needed the language to facilitate life in the country of adoption, or that they wanted to gain the right to continue living in it. Others wanted to be involved in the local community as interpreters or to undertake voluntary work. The ESOL lecturer suggested that some students just wanted to be able to talk to their children's teachers with confidence, while others might want to go on to study in higher education.

The Head of ESOL believed it was vital for people living in England to know about British culture, and how to access services, as well as how the education system worked. She therefore thought that the official citizenship material, which dealt with all these things, was very relevant for the students. The ESOL lecturer was of the same view, observing that students found the thematically based citizenship material useful, relevant and, hence, interesting. There was therefore general support by the staff at the college for both the idea of the ESOL with citizenship course, and for the official material that had been provided. In the experience of the ESOL lecturer, studying the elements of citizenship in the curriculum gave students confidence in terms of being able to find their way about in the UK. At the very least the students would have been in an environment where they had to practise their spoken English. The lecturer thought that some students who would previously have

needed an interpreter when they went to see the GP, might now have the confidence to go alone.

Students' accounts of their motivations

The views of the students resonated with those of the teaching staff. The students themselves did not need to be persuaded of the need to learn English. As they explained:

'This is our life now, we're in England.'

'Living in England, must be learning English.'

What students found most useful about the course was the learning and practice of English. Some said they did not speak English at all before they came to England, but the practice they had during ESOL lessons gave them confidence in using the language. As migrants from different countries and linguistic groups, the ESOL students also regarded English as being indispensable as the lingua franca, not only between them and the settled population, but also in communicating with other migrants. They were fully cognisant of the fact that facility in English would help them to get jobs.

In addition, the students expressed appreciation of the information they learned about life in the UK on the course. As one of them put it:

> 'Before coming this country, you don't know anything before. Now, we know many things… culture, language, transport… how to use the (tube) map, go everywhere'.

However, such content is standard to language teaching in many contexts and although these elements on the course gave students the information they needed to negotiate life in the UK, it was not necessarily the citizenship dimension that provided this.

The students said they had learned about English culture on the course, and had found this interesting, though in fact what they meant by English culture could well be the

content on cultural diversity. The course did seem to have contributed to altering some perceptions of the UK. All the students mentioned that they had become more aware of the diversity of the country in terms of ethnic cultures, religions, and nationalities, which they considered to be a positive feature. The impact of students' interactions within the college – and perhaps outside it as well - may have been at least as important as any classroom content.

As to whether they aspired towards greater civic participation, some of the students said they did, but 'in the future'. In other words, this was something that was theoretically desirable, but their immediate considerations were practical ones such as improving their English, pursuing further education, and getting a job. It is possible that the ESOL with citizenship classes suggest possibilities in terms of civic participation that might otherwise not have been drawn to their attention, but their motivations were, unsurprisingly, instrumental and personal.

Two of the students mentioned wanting to volunteer in their children's schools. However, both had been actively discouraged by their children from doing so because they were embarrassed at their parent's inability to express themselves well in English. Hence, lack of fluency in English constituted a barrier for even basic forms of civic participation, and having English lessons was an important element in helping the students overcome this barrier.

The course was also an avenue for migrant students to become British citizens. When the subject of naturalisation came up during the lesson, all, with the exception of the Portuguese student who has automatic residence entitlement as an EU citizen, expressed the wish to qualify for it. To fulfil one of the qualifications for citizenship these students needed to pass the Cambridge ESOL Skills for Life exams (at Entry Level 2 or 3) to show that they had made progress. Most expressed a degree of anxiety as to whether they would be able to do this.

Hence, the very practical emphasis of the ESOL material met the immediate needs of the students. Where citizenship was concerned, the students' idea of what it meant to be a British citizen tended to be expressed in very basic terms. For instance, one student (a Turkish Muslim) said she liked living in Britain very much, and considered the country to be: 'good – culture, people, everything'. She also spoke about how she appreciated freedom in the UK - both the freedom of religion, and the freedom to be educated - and how she enjoyed a sense of 'independence' in this country. Some of the other students concurred with this, saying that they too felt this greater sense of freedom, although one (also a Turkish Muslim) did not. For most students, therefore, there was a genuine sense of appreciation of being in a country, and part of a society, where there were freedoms that they had not necessarily enjoyed in their country of origin. But, because the students were starting from a low base where English language was concerned, their capacity to discuss the concepts of citizenship and democracy was limited. Indeed, none of the students understood what 'citizenship' was when the term was used during the focus group discussion, and it had to be explained to them by the lecturer in very simple terms. Hence, the question remains as to how far citizenship as presented in the ESOL lessons actually helped students to become citizens in a profound sense of the term, or to participate in the democratic process.

The students were working at different levels of English, in keeping with Crick's recommendation that the aim of ESOL was not to set a particular standard, but to encourage all migrants to improve their standard of English. Nonetheless, the requirement to show improvement, no matter how minimal, did provide a hurdle that migrants had to overcome, and the English exam was perceived as a high stakes test that could have serious consequences for them.

Both students and teaching staff were acutely aware that the acquisition of English facilitates economic integration. ESOL classes are therefore a good that is very much in demand, to the extent that there is insufficient subsidised provision in colleges. Both the

Assistant Director of Curriculum and the Head of ESOL at London Community College noted that, among the students at the college, was a large group who wanted to learn English to obtain employment. Some of these were in jobs that were below their skills level, or the level of the qualifications they had obtained in their country of origin, and they wanted to learn English to get a better job, to get promoted, or to go on to higher education. As will be seen, this was the group that would be most affected by the decision to means test ESOL funding.

Changes in funding of ESOL courses: another political struggle

ESOL with citizenship courses were at the time funded by the government through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Students on low incomes could obtain a fee waiver, subject to a means test. However, there is a huge demand for ESOL at London Community College. The Assistant Director of Curriculum said that the college had a waiting list of 635 at the time of the interview. She explained that London generally attracted newcomers because of job opportunities, and because there were established ethnic and migrant communities, other community and further colleges in London had similarly long waiting lists.

In 2006, the Learning and Skills Council (2006: 25) announced that ESOL classes would 'no longer attract automatic fee remission' and that, from the next year, only the unemployed and those receiving income-based benefits would have their fees waived; among other things, asylum seekers who were 19 years and above were no longer eligible for funding. There would be the introduction of means testing, and the identification of a 'priority group' for whom the learning of English was important 'both for community cohesion and integration and economic purposes' (Learning and Skills Council 2006: 25). Hence, the government policy was to focus funding and attempt to persuade employers to 'bear the full cost of any necessary English-language training' (Learning and Skills Council 2006: 25).

The LSC wrote by way of an explanation for its decision:

> ESOL provision and funding have expanded well beyond the expectations in the original Skills for Life strategy – but demand has risen even faster. Given the scale of demand and the pressure on resources, we must focus public investment on provision for those most at risk of disadvantage; and we should not support large-scale demand from those who can pay for their language learning (Learning and Skills Council 2006: 25).

This policy change had an immediate impact on London Community College. The Assistant Director of Curriculum estimated that the department would lose 6% of its ESOL budget. She thought that the proposal would most affect part time, working students who attended evening classes. This was a relatively small number but, according to the Assistant Director of Curriculum, these students were unlikely to be able to afford their fees unless their employers offered to pay.

In its efforts to explore other sources of funding, the Assistant Director of Curriculum said that the college was looking to set up its own business initiatives, where courses were funded by employers, but found that employers were generally unwilling to do so. She was sceptical that employers would change their position unless it was made mandatory for them to provide training for their employees, and fund this accordingly.

The Assistant Director of Curriculum described London Community College as being 'very responsive' to government priorities because their funding ultimately came from the government. The college's approach would be to take more of those students who were eligible for funding to replace those who were not. This was easily done because the college had a very long waiting list, many of whom would be eligible for funding. However she considered it 'a shame' to exclude part time, working students because this group comprised individuals who were most motivated to improve their English because they wanted to obtain better paid jobs, or to get promotion. The issue is who should be responsible for paying for their classes: the government, their employer or the students themselves.

The next section will examine the criticisms made against language tests in the light of our findings.

Discussion, and implications of the findings

It was noted that two types of criticisms have been made against language tests, and that these would also be applicable to the associated language courses. One is the issue as to whether there should be obligatory language tests at all, since this has implications for social justice. There is also the question as to whether language and citizenship tests and courses are a genuine contribution to preparation for citizenship or whether these, in effect, constitute a gatekeeping mechanism or discriminatory hurdle where language is a proxy for ethnicity. Related to this is the question of whether the emphasis on language as defining of nationhood and citizenship is a move away from multiculturalism towards a policy of assimilation. The question of who should be eligible for publicly funded programmes raises further issues of social justice.

With respect to the first set of criticisms, it is perhaps not unreasonable for a government representing the existing population of a country to impose some conditions on migrants applying for settlement or naturalisation. Their concern is with social cohesion not only in terms of the social and economic integration of migrants, but also of addressing any feelings of resentment stirred up in the majority population by the populist press and xenophobic political movements. The Government's rationale for the language and citizenship test in the UK is on the one hand to promote integration and civic participation, and on the other, and importantly, to provide evidence of these processes to existing citizens (Goldsmith 2008).

Nonetheless, there remains the question as to whether the requirement for these tests and courses do set up barriers for migrants in practice. For Joppke, what is ostensibly an integrationist policy has 'transmuted into a tool of migration control, helping states to restrict especially the entry of unskilled and non-adaptable family migrants' (Joppke 2007: 5).

The evidence from our study is that learning the language and acquiring information about life in the UK, including elements of citizenship, does give migrants confidence, and help them find their way in the country of adoption, as well as to integrate socially and perhaps economically as well. There is also evidence that it could facilitate civic participation.

Having said that, there is a difference in the way migrants from different countries are treated. EU citizens can migrate freely to the UK and have entitlement to settle and to vote. There is no language requirement placed on these migrants. This does suggest that the focus on language is directed at migrants from non-English speaking and non-EU countries, and also that the naturalization process is, in Goldsmith's terms, important in demonstrating attention to migration policy to the wider electorate.

There is also the impact of the funding cuts. Cantle had expressed the expectation that the use of English would become 'more rigorously pursued, with appropriate support' (Cantle 2001: 19), while Crick had urged the government to consider entitling 'all with an avenue to Indefinite Leave to Remain' to free courses (Home Office 2003: 24). As Kiwan, who was a member Life in the UK Advisory Group, put it:

> for the language requirement to truly be an entitlement, newcomers should be entitled to enrol in free accredited English language courses in further education colleges or other relevant community providers as soon as possible (Kiwan 2008: 70).

However, limitations on the budget of the Learning and Skills Council forced it to prioritise certain target groups in the funding of ESOL courses and consequently restrict access to subsidised provision. Consequently the good intentions of the advice to the government have not been realised. The impact of this, as has been seen, has been uneven, with some migrant groups being more adversely affected than others.

Given that the law requires progress in language competence rather than an absolute standard, it is difficult to argue that the language policy is intended as a barrier to

migrants gaining citizenship. Nonetheless, the language requirement has, in combination with the funding cuts for ESOL, resulted in practice in discriminatory barriers to citizenship, at least for some groups of migrants.

Nonetheless, while the language requirement may represent a slight shift towards assimilationism, the policy is essentially still liberal integrationist. In other words, it stems from an ideology with conceptions of nationhood that insist, among other things, that practical competence in the national language is important for economic, social and political integration. However, this does not necessarily imply – as assimilationism does - that migrants should abandon their own culture and entirely adopt the new one. For instance, the Singh report (2007), which has been accepted by the government, argues for multicultural diversity with a shared ethos of 'civility' which is part of mutual respect, not assimilation of the dominated to the dominant culture. Therefore, even with somewhat more rigorous language requirements being attached to citizenship, the dominant discourse is still multicultural and integrationist.

Among other things, the language policy was intended to address not merely 'the high numbers of people' who spoke little or no English, but also those who were 'isolated from the wider UK community' (Home Office 2003: 12, 51). There was also the stated aim for immigrants to share 'key values' with the settled population. It is certainly the case that language and citizenship tests and courses have their roots in discourses that suggest that migrants create communities that are essentially segregated from wider society, with minority languages being a marker of this separation. For example the Cantle report expressed concern about the fact that 'many communities operate[d] on the basis of a series of parallel lives' (Cantle 2001: 9).

It is perhaps unsurprisingly that minority communities are particularly likely to focus on building ties within their own community or, to use Putnam's term, 'bonding social capital' (Putnam 2000: 22-24). And the Government's response has been to accept the analysis

expressed in the report *Our Shared Future*, which suggested that the focus should be switched from bonding capital to what Putnam terms 'bridging social capital' (Singh 2007). Our observations suggest that the ESOL course at London Community College was indeed an opportunity to build bridging social capital. For instance, by providing a women-only environment, London Community College facilitated the participation of female students. These students came from a variety of backgrounds, not a single community. It could be seen from the lesson observed, and during the focus group discussion, that there was a sense of camaraderie within the student group; they bantered with each other, and the ESOL lecturer. They were creating new friendships and solidarities.

In addition, the ESOL with citizenship classes provided an interface with wider British society. The women in the group had made friends with their English ESOL lecturer, who was warm and enthusiastic, and who believed in her role of welcoming migrants into the country, and helping them to understand life in the UK, with an emphasis on respect for diversity. Whilst being respectful of the beliefs and practices of her students, her perspective was that of liberalism. For instance, she attempted to empower the women by providing opportunities in class to talk about contraception.

In her study on refugee and migrant women in the UK, Clayton observed that these women experienced discrimination, low self-confidence, and racism, and that the worst affected were those 'with experience but no or low formal qualification and little or no English' (Clayton 2005: 228). She recommended 'programmes of integration, involving information about labour, the labour market and cultural norms in the new country', although she specifically excluded the possibility of sanctions against those who did not want such programmes (Clayton 2005: 238). The ESOL with citizenship course we observed provided many of the elements of language and cultural education that she recommended and appeared to boost confidence. Hence, it can be argued that the requirement to demonstrate progress prior to naturalisation provides the encouragement to enrol in ESOL with

citizenship classes that may ease the isolation that may be experienced by migrants, and help the building of bridging capital.

Our observation of an example of a micro level application of the policy of linking language and citizenship is unable to cast light on the impact of the policies at a macro level where the result may be quite different from that intended. Language and citizenship tests and courses are part of a set of policies regulating entry to the UK, and it is not difficult to identify how such policies may in practice result in discriminatory barriers to citizenship. Having said that, it is necessary to distinguish between the effects of tests and of courses. Encouraging English language fluency amongst migrants through ESOL provision aids their social integration, and political and civic participation; making citizenship dependent on passing tests, on the other hand, may unjustly debar some from participating as citizens.

In summary, the language requirement appears to target non-English speaking and non-EU migrants; at the same time, the funding changes for ESOL has led to the erection of discriminatory barriers to citizenship for certain groups. Having said that, the fact that the law requires demonstration of progress in language competence, rather than demanding an absolute standard, suggests that citizenship and language tests or courses are about improving integration by encouraging better language competence and knowledge about the UK. In our view, the new immigration requirement and the funding decision are contradictory and muddled, rather than part of a concerted attempt to impose assimilation. From our evidence, the results of the policies appear similarly mixed, with some migrants not being able to access funding and, consequently, the rights of citizenship, while those attending the ESOL with citizenship course reporting benefits from it.

Conclusion

The criticisms that have been made against language testing *per se* have not been supported by the evidence in our study. The ESOL students we spoke to did not demonstrate any sense that their right to use their own language was being violated, that

they were being made to assimilate into British society, or that they were being prevented from accessing rights and benefits. Instead, these women saw the ability to speak English, and the confidence that the classes brought them, as being the avenue to accessing health and welfare benefits, as well as civic participation. Put another way, the ability to speak the lingua franca formed the basis, not only of a better future in and integration into British society, but also of citizenship for these women. As far the funding of ESOL was concerned, the impact of the cuts was such that working migrants who were likely to take ESOL lessons part time would lose out. However, it is perhaps not unreasonable for government to attempt to move some responsibility for funding language training to employers or even to the students themselves who may consider it as an investment in their future. Ours is a case study, and there are limits to the conclusions that can be drawn from it. It does suggest the need for further research. At the same time, the use of a comparator traditional ESOL case could address the question as to what the ESOL with citizenship courses offers over and above that which is already offered on existing ESOL courses. Nonetheless, it is clear that new language and funding policies have resulted in discriminatory and arguably racist effects. On the other hand, for many individual migrants, access to English language courses provides an opportunity for personal development and for building bridging capital.

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