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INTRODUCING COMMUNITY ESOL

The Syrian family has arrived, Mum, Dad, four children aged 10, 8, 5 and a 4 month old baby. The school closes in a fortnight's time for the summer holiday along with the FE College and the Community Learning Centres in Fishguard and Haverfordwest. Where do we teach the adults while caring for the children during the summer? That is how the story began!

Working in partnership with Pembrokeshire County Council, the Home Office and the Fishguard Sea Scout Leaders, the Croeso Abergwaun ESOL team began a daily programme for the Syrian adults in one half of the Sea Scout premises. In the other half, the primary school's deputy head and a teaching assistant provided a programme of children's activities with other language volunteers. Baby stayed with Mum listening to English!

Both adults were at a pre-entry level with no experience of spoken or written English. For them, English was simply 'noise'! The Home Office wanted schemes to prioritise integrating the refugees into the community. The challenge was how to facilitate this.

The ESOL Co-ordinator and team decided to model the language classes as friendship groups with the qualified ESOL tutor leading the sessions. A couple of voluntary language tutors were always present to help by modelling language. Different voluntary and qualified ESOL tutors attended throughout the 5 weekdays offering a minimum of 2hrs formal tuition per day. Friendships grew as the family and volunteers shopped together and joined in community events. The Syrian family used their English gradually developing their own community network of friendships and activities. At the start of the Autumn Term, three sessions occurred in the Community Learning Centre, then one in an upstairs area of a town café and a fifth in the Library. The once unknown family were now known in the Community and a new ESOL provision had begun in the town.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ESOL?

Community ESOL is a specific approach to teaching English as a Second or Other Language that has been created by Croeso Abergwaun. It has been formulated in response to the Home Office request that language acquisition is to form a central part of the Community Sponsored Syrian Resettlement Programme.

It is based on a **holistic** approach to language learning. Everything is important. All activity and involvement in the community is relevant to the efficient use and learning of language.

Therefore, community participation, personal interaction and friendship form essential components to the language learning process. They are also continually nurturing the inclusion of an individual, a couple, children and a family into the **social networks** of a community. It is these networks that form a crucial role in giving a community its **cultural identity** and a person a sense of belonging, of being integrated into the community. So the process of learning English is simultaneously the process of becoming a member of the community.

Follow up Suggestions

- List activities that an adult student is likely to do in your area.

Example: Fishguard has sports clubs, art groups, gardening groups, voluntary theatre work, a leisure centre, swimming pool and gym, a community learning centre, to name a few.

- List the social networks in which you participate.
- Discuss how the information identified in the above two bullet points can become part of the language learning process for your students

Community ESOL is based on the premise that language acquisition depends upon developing specific aural and oral skills because listening and speaking are the fundamental language skills for communicating with others.

Example: Using mimicking exercises with students:

Tutor says – ‘My name is Boyd’ and asks the student to mimic the sentence but with their name at the end

Other sensory actions such as touching, smelling, tasting and seeing are all used to further the process of language development.

Example: Friends baking biscuits and Syrian pasties together

Listening and speaking are used as the primary tools for learning to read the visual symbolic of language in the form of the written word.

Reading develops as students recognise the symbolic form of what they are already hearing and speaking.

Example: Use flash cards to put the separate words ‘My name is Nadia’ on the table but not in the correct order - all speak the short sentence several times - then the student re-arranges the separate words into the correct order. Repeat the sentence.

Consequently, students start reading complete sentences which they need and want in order to communicate with others in the community.

Later, writing is introduced and learnt as requested and needed by the student but only after clear verbalisation and reading of the words.

Example: a shopping list is made, flour, cooking oil. pulses etc.

All language is therefore contextual and thematically based on student desires and needs. Although no prescribed curriculum or syllabus is followed, there is a careful structuring and step by step building up of language in line with the student’s ability to learn.

Follow up suggestions

- Discuss and then outline the possible contents of the first 2hr Community ESOL session with your adult students. (Pre-entry level)
- Identify the themes which might be most relevant to new students arriving in the community.
- Discuss what could be the most challenging aspects in teaching English

A CLT is a volunteer who doesn't have an ESOL/TEFL qualification but who wants to help the refugees become integrated into the community by practicing their newly acquired English wherever they go.

The CLT role is central to the process of **community integration**.

The CLT is an accompanist for the student and the family providing a personal link to the community networks. They may accompany them to community events such as a carnival, a festival celebration, a country show, a swimming gala or any other similar event.

A CLT may also accompany a student, along with an interpreter or 'Other' professional, to attend official appointments for instance at the Benefit Office, the School, the GP Surgery, the Dentist, or a hospital.

The CLT focuses on helping students hear, recognise and then repeat key phrases and words that are spoken to them using correct grammatical structures. So they are a link person who supports and encourages a student to **use and apply** the language that has been learnt in the classroom. They are also responsible for providing weekly feedback to the Community ESOL Tutor (CET) on the student's ability to actually use the language and they help to identify what new vocabulary a student may need to learn in order to communicate effectively at an upcoming appointment, meeting or activity.

They are particularly valuable as a group member in the Community ESOL class setting. Here they help the dynamic of the group by **modelling responses** as required through the leading of the CET. In the class setting the CLT depends upon the CET for guidance as to how they are to act in their supportive role.

Follow up Suggestions

- List the key phrases and words that a CLT will help a student to hear and recognise within the first month of arriving in the community.
- Identify what you consider to be the particular skills a person needs in order to become an effective CLT.
- Discuss what challenges a CLT may face as they accompany a student going to official appointments or visiting the shops. Suggest possible ways for dealing with them?

The CET has to have an **accredited ESOL/TEFL qualification** that has been approved by the Home Office. They may be a retired person or working or perhaps even employed in a College or by a Local Authority. In Croeso Abergwaun our qualified team consists of nine ESOL/TEFL tutors with all of them working voluntarily for the community sponsorship programme.

The ESOL tutor's role is governed primarily by student needs. There is no pre-existing text book or curriculum. The student and tutor **mutually agree** what they will do with the tutor ensuring that the student enjoys the group learning experience. The skill of the CET lies in the ability to create a relevant and appropriate thematically based learning environment. This may involve doing different activities both inside and outside a classroom setting and will probably use a variety of sensory experiences.

For Example: Learning to use a map of the area can first involve studying the names of roads and their location in the classroom then second, taking the map and going out to find the roads and various landmarks.

The CET also ensures that the language he/she is using to communicate with the student is at a suitable level for the student, that it is correctly structured and that the student understands what is being said to them and what they have been asked to do.

A CLT is always present joining in the Community ESOL class session adopting a student role under the leadership of the CET.

CLTs and CETs become members of the student's developing network of friends and acquaintances. Developing a student's **networking ability** is crucial for them to become successfully integrated into the community in which they are living.

Follow up Suggestion

- A student assessed as being at a pre-entry level of language ability wants to go on a bus to visit a friend in a nearby town. Discuss then write an outline of a series of English sessions and learning experiences that you think will enable the student and the family to enjoy a successful return journey to their friend's home.

On arriving in the UK, a student hearing English words for the first time, only hears 'noise'. Our need to communicate must therefore depend upon **visual skills** such as smiles, appropriate hand greetings and gestures, the use of objects alongside the welcoming words of an **Interpreter**.

From the moment they arrive in the community the family meet members of the Croeso Abergwaun group with specific skills, for instance to support them to access and use the benefit system. They help to settle the family into the home, any children into schools or perhaps a College and accompany them doing everyday activities such as food shopping.

All Croeso Abergwaun members, to a greater or lesser extent, are CLTs.

After 2-3 weeks of resettlement the adult students will commence a minimum of 10hrs a week Community ESOL learning in a class setting. By this time they will have already begun to change word noise into meaningful words during the initial resettlement period.

Cultural characteristics of students and tutors are mutually respected. Students choose to what extent the family become involved in both the religious and secular celebrations of the community at large.

Community ESOL is a flexible mode for learning with the ability to adjust and adapt when needed to accommodate religious needs, for instance, the observance of Ramadan for a Muslim family.

As trust and the ability to communicate with others develop, **intra-cultural** activities emerge. These may include being invited guests at a welsh wedding, enjoying a barbeque with new friends cooking both kebabs and burgers and laughing together at the celebration party given for the community by the refugees as they approached the end of their first year in Wales.

Follow up Suggestions

- Discuss what intra-cultural events your programme might create
- Share what the implications might be for the community as it begins to engage with different cultural practices.
- Share how it is possible to form new understandings and structures of community that reject exclusivity in favour of a respectful sharing of cultural differences?

LANGUAGE ISSUES TO BE AWARE OF:

Whether you are going to be teaching English as a qualified ESOL Tutor, or you are a member of your resettlement group's Community Language Tutor Team, it is important to bear in mind the complexity of your own everyday speech. There's a lot more to it than just slowing down as you talk to your students!

As fluent speakers of English, what seems like a very simple sentence to us will be very alien in its structure for the student.

1) Listening comprehension

This is the greatest challenge to anyone learning a new language; when a student hears a sentence spoken in a language they've never heard before, all that they hear is a rush of sound.

Picking out individual words in a spoken sentence is very difficult when the native speaker is speaking at their usual speed.

A simple phrase needs to be heard many times and preferably from different speakers, before the learner can recognise the individual words in a sentence and understand the meaning of the whole phrase.

Example: 'I do not know' is usually contracted to 'I don't know' and often sounds more like 'Ah-d'n-oh'.

For the illiterate learner, or a learner unfamiliar with the script that English uses, trying to relate the written word to the sound of the spoken word is very difficult. Even more so because English is without rules of pronunciation, meaning that the relationship between letters and sounds is arbitrary to say the least.

2) Pronunciation

Many languages – such as Welsh or Spanish, are relatively phonetic; that is to say that the letters or combinations of letters in a word, are pronounced according to specific rules of pronunciation which can be taught.

English is **NOT** written phonetically – there are no rules, merely *tendencies*. So learning how to pronounce English has to be done word by word!!

Many consonants in English are – mercifully - pronounced the same way wherever they occur, although not 'C', 'G', 'F', 'H', 'P', 'T', 'S'.

Vowels in English are the real problem; there are at least 3 ways to pronounce 'a' for example, and at least 3 ways to pronounce 'e' – and there are no rules! And that's not forgetting vowels in combination (see below).

So you might say that it is easier to regard English words as pictograms made of letters, whose sound needs to be remembered. Even then, you will come across things such as the differing yet grammatically correct, pronunciation of the word 'read':

- 1) I **read** a newspaper every day.
- 2) Yesterday, I *read* a newspaper.

The colours red and blue represent differences in pronunciation, the italics in the second sentence indicate that the different pronunciation indicates a different meaning; that of *tense* : the time-frame for the reading activity.

3) Literacy

When your student's mother tongue is written in a different script, this raises problems of literacy.

As you will have seen under the heading of 'Pronunciation', English is particularly problematic in this regard, even for students whose mother tongue actually shares the same script as English.

In our experience, we soon discovered that we needed to teach specific literacy-focussed lessons to help our students to read and write English.

Example: Using words on flash cards that the student had learnt to speak and use in short sentences, a few were randomly placed on the table and the student was invited to arrange them in an order that made a short sentence. They then read the sentence.

4) Word order

Here is a basic example with corresponding colour codes for direct comparison of structures (without having to use grammatical terms) between two European languages : English and Welsh.

English 1: **I am going.**

Welsh 1: **Dw i'n mynd.**

English 2: **I go.**

Welsh 2: **Af (i).**

In these sentences that have the same *meaning* in both languages, you can see by the colour coding, that the respective component parts are in different positions within the sentence, depending on the language. (This can be done with coloured pens on the classroom whiteboard too, of course)

Also: a single word ‘ **going** ’ in one language may appear as two words or elements ‘ **'n mynd** ’ in the other language.

5) Script

Not all languages share the same letter shapes (script).

For instance:

The Arabic word for ‘house’ looks like this: منزل.

The English word for the same thing looks like this: ‘house’

Which is why, to a native Arabic speaker, the English word ‘house’ might as well be written as: ٤١٣٤١. And they would be looking at it from right to left, as they would look at a word in Arabic.

This is because the components of the Arabic word are both written and read from right to left, not from left to right as in English and other European languages.

Eye movements therefore become critically important because the student has to reverse the movement. Headaches may occur for a period while the eye muscles and the brain learn to behave in new ways.

6) Conceptual differences

The students will have learning problems that we as teachers cannot anticipate, because there are often conceptual differences between English and the student’s own mother tongue.

Example 1 of 2 :

The mother tongue of our first students was Kurdish. We had no Kurdish interpreter but by a little time spent reading a ‘Teach yourself Kurdish’ book, we discovered that the language does not distinguish between the pronouns ‘**He**’, ‘**She**’ and ‘**Them**’. This piece of information saved both the teachers and the students a lot of time and trouble because we had become aware of the problem. With this ‘advance warning’, we were able to plan ahead and deal with it effectively. In the absence of an interpreter or a

'Teach yourself Kurdish' book, we could not have anticipated the problem – or indeed some of the others that we have since discovered.

Example 2 of 2 :

English has two 'Present' tenses:

1) The Present Continuous Tense: 'We are going'

2) The Present Simple Tense : 'We go'

You will need to teach the conceptual difference between '**We are going**' and '**We go**', so that your student understands when to use the one and when to use the other.

So, if you don't have an interpreter of the students' language in your Community Resettlement group, find yourself a linguist and set them to work! Modern Languages teachers are a good bet – so scour your local Comprehensive schools!

As ESOL teachers, we are not expected to be able to speak or understand the mother tongue/s of our students. Yet this is a handicap for both teacher and student.

We are not expected to have such knowledge because usually, in an ESOL class full of students of different ethnicities, there will be several mother tongues. The teacher cannot be expected to be infinitely multilingual!

That said, in the context of Community ESOL, where a given community is giving refuge to a small number of people - often just one family at a time - the students will frequently share a mother tongue. When that is the case, a little studying by the teacher of the basic structures of the students' mother tongue can go a long way in helping the students to acquire English more quickly and more effectively.

7) A Non-Curricular, no course-book approach

Initially, when the students began having their English lessons, it was enough for us to teach them useful everyday vocabulary and set phrases for the immediate needs that they would have.

After the first week or two of English lessons, we began to introduce simple structuring – that is to say, showing them the building blocks of sentences and how to put them together in order to create a coherent sentence.

We started by thinking of how we *all* communicate verbally. Essentially, we use just 4 basic sentence types:

1) **Affirmative statements** : 'We are going shopping.'

2) **Negative statements** : 'We are not going shopping.'

3) **Questions** : 'Are we going shopping?'

4) **Answers**: 'Yes (we are).' / 'No (we are not).'

The 4 examples above were written in one of the two present tenses that English has, but which other languages do not necessarily have.

Follow-up suggestion

- With a colleague, try and figure out how you would go about teaching the following two things to a person with no previous knowledge of English - or indeed - the script in which English is written:

- 1) The difference between 'We are going' and 'We go'.
- 2) An action in the past, an action in the present and an action in the future.

Resources Online and elsewhere

There is a plethora of resources for teaching English to non-English speakers online, some are excellent, some not so much, then there are some you pay for, some you don't. There is no ideal website for resources.

To be honest, in our experience – we were working with adult students with no previous knowledge of English or of its script – the online resources weren't of much help; there wasn't that much available for students like ours.

One of the most useful things to have, however, is a **Picture Dictionary**.

Nursery school **picture books** are also useful as they associate basic vocabulary with images.

You'll need to be able to **mime actions**, sometimes with **props**, sometimes without.

You'll need to be able to **draw diagrams** on the board – such as : a horizon line with a dawning sun a midday sun and a setting sun with arrows between the sun symbols showing direction from left to right, then another horizon line, above which is drawn a crescent moon and stars. This is enough to convey morning, afternoon, evening and night. You get the ideal

Using **coloured pens** to identify different parts of speech in a phrase written on the white board can also help with students' intuitive comprehension of structure and word order without needing to use grammatical terms – which they wouldn't understand anyway. Just be sure to remember which colours you used for which elements!

It's been a learning process for us all and we've enjoyed it. We're sure that you will too.



HOW DO WE TEACH?

We don't follow a course book or a printed curriculum. We encourage our students to tell us what they would like to learn whilst also ensuring that they are being taught the grammatical structures they need but might not have the language to ask for yet. The students need to be happy with what they are being taught and feel it's the relevant language they need right now. It is crucial to build language patterns up gradually with a lot of verbal repetition. The following is an example of building on a simple pattern.

I like chocolate.

I don't like pasta.

- An affirmative phrase and a negative phrase. Along with the question and answer -

Do you like cake? Yes, I do (like cake). No, I don't (like cake).

I first used nouns (in this case food) and then used the same pattern with verbs.

I like swimming.

I don't like cleaning.

We all got to know a surprising amount about each other just with these simple phrases.

This was then extended to -

I like chocolate and cake.

I like chocolate but I don't like olives.

I don't like olives or pasta.

And the same again but with verbs -

I like swimming and playing football.

I like swimming but I don't like cleaning.

I don't like running or cleaning.

They also learnt the third person and were then able to tell me about their children. **Does Cathy like chocolate? Yes she does. No she doesn't.**

Once they were confident using this pattern, it was quite quick for them to apply it to

I can swim and cook.

I can swim but I can't dance.

I can't dance or sing.

Can you swim? Yes, I can. No, I can't.

Obviously this isn't one lesson. It was taught over a number of weeks. The really crucial thing is to maximise the amount of time your students are speaking in class. Don't make the mistake of talking too much yourself!

At the fortnightly meeting of CETs and CLTs we discuss a relevant theme and which language structures to hang from that theme. For example, when our students were in the process of moving house I used rooms in the new house as a way to teach prepositions and possessives - **Adam's room is opposite the kitchen**. Various grammar points were taught by the different CETs along with vocabulary but we all used the common theme of moving house so that the language taught was directly relevant to what our students were doing outside of the classroom and therefore immediately useful and usable.

After a lesson, the CET emails a brief outline of the lesson to the other CETs along with any new language taught. I adjust my lesson plans to take into account things that have come up in my previous lesson, things the students request and feedback from the other CETs about what they have taught and what the students might need more practice with.

The **Lead CET** collects together all the new language taught in the week's classes and sends this out to the team of CLTs, who take the language taught in the class into the community with the students. This means that by the time I see the students again the following week they will have had a chance to use the language in the appropriate context.

As well as the CET and the childminder, a CLT is present in the lessons as seen in the video Community ESOL. The CLTs are not passive observers in the classroom - they are active members of the class - in the first few months especially, when the students had very limited English, the CLTs were invaluable for modelling language.

The classes are less formal than those taught through a Local Authority. I have a dual relationship with the students - both tutor and member of the same local community. This allows me to incorporate language relating to local places and events into the lessons. I teach them once a week in a fairly formal setting but I also occasionally drop round to their house to drink Syrian tea and eat homemade yoghurt whilst my son plays football with their children in the garden.

Follow up questions for discussion

- In small groups, devise a lesson plan in preparation for making a journey by train and bus. What language will you teach? What materials might you use? For example, a bus timetable.
- Can you think of a simple language structure that can be gradually built on? Discuss why it would be useful for your students in their first few months here. In which real life situations might they use it?
- How will you ensure your students have the confidence to ask for what they need/want? List the possible obstacles to this and discuss how you might overcome them.
- In groups, discuss what you think would be the best way for your group of CLTs and CETs to communicate and plan together.
- List any advantages you can think of for the tutor being a member of the same local community as the students

GETTING READY TO GO SHOPPING

When teaching money, we used actual money and not just the idea of it.

I made sure my purse was full of coins of every different denomination but I also asked them to empty their pockets too!

The aim was to ensure that they understood the worth of each coin relative to all the others. So not just to be able to recognise a five pence piece but also to know that twenty of them are equal to a pound coin, two of them equal to a ten pence coin and so on. It was interesting to see that although they could generally name the coins, the students were surprised at their relative value. It was also striking that the student who did most of the family's shopping was able to recognise the coins far more quickly than the other, who we have since encouraged to participate more in the shopping.

They built many piles of coins on the classroom table e.g. a pound made of twenty pence coins, a pound made of five pence coins, twenty pence made of two pence pieces and so on. We did this at the start of the lesson for a couple of weeks until they could do it completely confidently.

They then learnt how to say (and read and write) £1.98, for instance, but also build a pile of coins worth £1.98. In this way, money was never taught in the abstract.

In subsequent lessons the students revised and learnt names for various food stuffs and learnt to ask and answer **How much is the butter? It's £1.25. How much are the biscuits? They're £1.99**

They took turns buying things from each other - handing over the money, giving change, checking change - at all times with real notes and coins.

Students need to be taught language as they will actually hear it - there's no point in them learning and then listening for "it is £1.25" when what they'll hear in a shop is "it's £1.25". At the same time they need to understand that "it's" is simply the abbreviation of the building blocks "it" and "is". It's also worth pointing out that what people actually say is "1.99" without the word pound.

The lesson that was filmed for the video introduced the pattern “a something of something”, for example **a loaf of bread, a jar of jam, a pound of potatoes**, and also **two packets of biscuits**.

This was then extended to sentences such as How much is a jar of jam? It's £1.55. How much are two packets of biscuits? They're 99p.

They later went out in the community looking at the produce in a cafe/grocery store and practising this pattern with actual jars of jam etc.

Because this new language was emailed out to all the CLTs, they now know that when they are in a cafe for example, the students are capable of going to the counter to pay and should be encouraged to do so.

THE DRIVING THEORY TEST - A CHALLENGE!

In the video there is a scene in which the father of our refugee family is learning to drive. We have found that there is a great demand from women and from teenagers as well as men to learn to drive. There is, however, a problem. The English employed in driving has its own cultural niche.

Consider, for example, the instruction to “pull over to the hard shoulder”. Indeed, the verb “pull” has specific uses in the context of driving. You can “pull in” “pull out” and “pull up”. But you can’t “pull on” or “pull off” You have to “move off” or “move on”.

Consider also:- “When you are moving in queues of traffic, be aware that motorcyclists may filter between lanes and cut in just in front of you.” The expressions “filter”, “lanes”, and “cut in” have been imported from other contexts to apply to the context of traffic. So when you are learning to drive, you also need to learn the special uses appropriate to the context.

This is a major hurdle in learning to drive and especially to pass the Driving Theory Test. This test is conducted in English or Welsh and stretches the abilities of even native speakers. So for non-native speakers this test is an additional problem to be overcome if they are to be allowed to drive.

We have developed a team approach to this problem. Our prime resources are (1) The Official DVSA Theory Test for Car Drivers, and (2) The Official Theory Test Kit for Drivers. The former is a book containing information and learning resources on every aspect of driving. The second comes in the form of a DVD ROM on the theory test and another DVD ROM on Hazard Perception

We make good use of the online “mock” driving theory tests, which are really useful as they are true mock ups of the original tests. We have found that as no one is allowed to take the test in their own language we have to use the English tests. To help the students with this we use three tabs on a web browser. One has the actual test, the second has Google translate so we can immediately translate any words in the test which the students do not understand and the third uses Google images to pictorially illustrate items such as “hard shoulder” or “motorway warning lights”.

During the teaching session we can switch from one tab to another at the click of a mouse – copying and pasting words that need to be translated.

These resources are the foundation of our teaching sessions, taking topic by topic and working through them with our students. Our team consists of three members: - firstly, the volunteer who handles the driving lessons; secondly, the technician who handles the on-screen visual material during the teaching session and who also ensures that the students have access to the DVD material on their home computers: thirdly the ESOL qualified teacher who is responsible for ensuring that essential language on each topic is prepared for the students to learn, paying particular attention to the contextual elements in the vocabulary. In the classroom these three participate as a team. Three heads are better than one!

Working together can get lively! Especially when the Question and Answers sessions go up on the screen, and when the students beat the teachers, the atmosphere can get quite competitive!





**COMMUNITY
ESOL**