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# Towards learner autonomy: raising critical awareness of learning in an adult refugee ESOL Literacy class

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Philosophy in Second Language Teaching**

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**2015**



## **Abstract**

An action research project was undertaken in an adult refugee ESOL Literacy class to determine whether a teacher could change tasks or teaching methods to help learners develop critical awareness of learning. After an initial review of available research regarding refugee learners with low levels of literacy, learner autonomy and critical awareness, action research processes were reviewed and the teaching context of the particular class that would be involved in the research project was investigated. The research project was designed to be carried out in two stages. Firstly, three teaching techniques were selected and tasks designed that would suit learners with a range of different skills in the class. Secondly, the tasks were implemented and refined during the process of data collection over a period of two terms. Three types of tasks were used during the data collection period: dictation, the use of Cuisenaire rods, and the use of computer-based tasks.

Data was collected from participating learners in the class by means of learner logs where learners wrote reflections on their learning. Data was also gathered through teacher observation and reflections. Informal discussions with other teachers in the programme formed an important source of data of the study. Teacher reflections used three maxims to focus the observations, looking at connections to prior learning, peer learning and constraints that influenced the research.

The unique challenges of the teaching context and learners in the programme necessitated some changes to the design of the study. Methods typically used in alternative assessment for ESL learners were employed to observe some learners' awareness of linguistic competence, involving the Cuisenaire rods. Different forms of dictation tasks were found to be useful for different skills level groups. It was not possible to fully investigate the use of computer-based tasks owing to the constraints of the particular teaching context.

This study was carried out over a very short period, with a relatively small number of participants. The findings are not conclusive but seem to indicate that changes to teaching methods can help learners to develop increased critical awareness of learning. A greater emphasis on peer learning, limited teacher involvement in the higher skills level groups and the use of alternative assessment methods for ongoing self-evaluation in the lowest skill level group all contributed to raising critical awareness of learning.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I give thanks and praise to God who guided me to this place and time to do the work which He has prepared me for.

Secondly, this study could not have been completed without the support and willing participation of the learners in this class. We are on a journey together, to make a new life in a new country. What we have learned about ourselves during this project will enable us to continue this journey – strong and confident in our own abilities.

Thirdly and importantly, thank you to Dorothy Thwaite and Jo de Lisle from English Language Partners New Zealand (ELPNZ) who gave their unconditional approval and support for the project. And to all the teachers in the ELPNZ ESOL Literacy programme who willingly and enthusiastically participated in the informal discussions and who made time to talk through the implementation and changes to tasks for this study – you are awesome and I am very grateful. Your support made it possible to weave a rich tapestry with many different strands.

Finally, a very grateful thank you to Prof. Cynthia White and Dr Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire for providing guidance and assistance throughout this period of study. Your expert counsel, objective input and the confidence you showed in my ability to complete this study provided direction and support when most needed.

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