Teaching refugees as adult learners in a research-informed way

Norskkonferansen
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Tena koutou katoa
E nga hau e wha
E nga iwi e tau nei
Tena koutou katoa
No Whanganui ahau
Ko Ruapehu te maunga
Ko Whanganui te awa
Ko St Paulii von Hamburg te waka
Ko Ngati Pakeha te iwi
Ko John Benseman toku ingoa
No reira, tena koutou
Tena koutou
Tena koutou katoa
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NZ</th>
<th>Norway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>4.4 m</td>
<td>4.9 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sq kms</td>
<td>268,680</td>
<td>385,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total sheep</td>
<td>31.1m (was 60+m)</td>
<td>2m</td>
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</table>
Ask those sitting next to you

- How did you learn to teach?

- What have been the greatest influences on how you teach?
How do you plan/design your teaching?

- Tradition – ‘war stories’
- Hearsay - suggestions or advice from colleagues
- Observing other teachers
- Fads and fashions
- ‘It’s common sense’
- Myths
- ‘Gut feeling’ - intuition
- ‘We’ve always done it like this’
- Based on a philosophy
Teaching is...

* **an art** – intuitive, creative, unique, open to multiple interpretations

* **a science** – based on research, predictable, with consistent results

* **both an art and a science** – based on a preponderance of research evidence with allowance for the ‘human condition’, different contexts and learners
What do we know from research about how teachers teach?

- Not a lot overall
- Practice often doesn’t match beliefs
- Most teachers use a limited repertoire of teaching strategies
- A lot of ‘teaching time’ is taken up with non-teaching activities
- Most teachers teach how they themselves were taught as learners, “with the assumption that what worked for them will work for anyone”
How can we identify effective teaching?

- Study effective teachers
- Ask learners/teachers
- Map results/evaluation sheets
- Practitioner wisdom
- Controlled research studies

* Each has strengths and weaknesses
Study aims

* to document and analyse the learning needs and issues of adult refugees with low language and literacy skills
* to identify educational strategies for teaching refugee learners and provide a teaching resource for other teachers based on the project’s findings
Very little research on this topic in New Zealand or internationally

Refugees consistently identified as a high-priority group because of level of need and potential value of interventions

80% of adult quota refugees in NZ have not completed a primary school education and about half of this group are pre-literate with the remainder semi-literate

Refugees since 1994:

* 40% have no literacy skills in their own language
* 40% with beginner-level English have had fewer than 7 yrs schooling
Without basic learning and reading-related skills, progress is slow

Inadequacy of refugee education in NZ:
  * availability of courses
  * relevance of teaching content

Issue of how much is enough?
  * Variations: 500-1200 hours for ‘survival English’

Refugees as learners:
  * migration stress
  * acculturative stress
  * traumatic stress

Related research findings
Related research findings

* Common issues:
  * Lack of education in country of origin
  * Not literate in mother tongue
  * Concentration problems
  * Self-perception - low self-esteem is matched with low expectations
  * Low motivation, interest and confidence
  * Distrust
  * Fear of authority figures
  * Sleep problems and tiredness
Refugee learners want:
- Greater independence and control in contrast to past lives
- Integration into family networks and communities
- Emotional support

Effective strategies:
- Bi-lingual teachers readily available
- 10-15 learners per class
- Homogeneity of learners in classes
- Bringing in the ‘outside’, connecting to real issues and events
- Varied practice and interaction
- Emphasis on oral communication
- Longer duration and intensity of classes, regular attendance
Methodology

* Face-to-face interviews:
  * 2 programme co-ordinators
  * 5 course tutors
  * 6 bi-lingual tutors
  * 36 refugee learners with interpreters

* Refugee interviewees (in small grps):
  * 29 women, 7 men
  * average age 44.2 years (range of 21 – 71 yrs)
  * Most married, 4 widowed, 1 divorced, 4 single
  * All have at least some family in New Zealand, including grandparents, siblings and grand-children
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Tutors</th>
<th>Bi-lingual tutors</th>
<th>Learners</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Countries of origin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PN/Feilding</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Nepali Burmese</td>
<td>Bhutan Burma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tamil Dari Pashtu Amharic Urdu Burmese</td>
<td>Sri Lanka Afghanistan Ethiopia Pakistan India Burma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Massey Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Arabic Kurdish</td>
<td>Iran Iraq Kuwait Palestine</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Lynn Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Parsi</td>
<td>Iran Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Their courses

- Six classes at five venues, usually community centres
- All had bi-lingual teachers
- 16-20 learners per class
- Most receive 10 hours teaching per week
- Teaching content based on ELP curriculum with learner input
- Usually recruited via social worker or community/family contacts
- High levels of attendance
36 Learner perspectives

- Unanimously positive about their courses
- Value bi-lingual tutors very highly
- Challenges:
  - not being able to hear sounds
  - speaking, retaining new learning (‘I’m too old’)
  - spelling English words, not understanding word meanings
  - lack of time to practise with busy family life
  - feeling tired, homesickness, depression
  - lack of access to the tutor due to large numbers in class and constant new arrivals
  - sight and other health problems
  - coping with family members’ health issues
All were female, average of 13 yrs teaching experience, with specialist ESOL qualifications

All had experience of teaching English to non-refugees

[not all experienced ESOL teachers are appropriate for working with refugees]

Learner progress is incremental and slow
5 tutors’ perspectives

- Differences between refugees and other ESOL teaching:
  - Psychological trauma affects ability to learn (usually poor attention spans and ‘nervous energy’)
  - Dealing with dislocated families, esp. some family still in dangerous situations and general homesickness
  - Low-levels of literacy skill – have to ‘learn to learn’ many basic skills (establishing routines, setting goals, interpreting symbolic representations such as maps and diagrams, dealing with abstractions, appropriate classroom behaviour)
6 Bi-lingual tutors

- Varied backgrounds & qualifications
- All had attended ELP training
- Role: ‘supporting & assisting’ the class tutor in collaborative way:
  - repeating instructions to individual learners
  - repeating pronunciation of key words, phrases
  - translating vocabulary into learners’ L1
  - detecting issues as they arose
  - providing positive feedback in English and L1
  - setting extra work for those who had completed tasks
  - working with individual learners struggling with tasks
‘Important to make the students feel safe – they know there will be someone who can explain.’

‘[it’s about] filling the gap, working like a bridge, explaining when they don’t understand either in English or L1’

‘Important to share the background of the learners with the tutor to explain why they do or don’t do things - most learners had never been to school, didn’t always understand what was expected of them’
Challenges for BLTs:
- Constant intakes of new learners
- Demands of large, multi-level classes, often in confined spaces
- Identifying what learners specifically need help with
- ‘Getting them to understand’ – especially with instructions
- Giving attention to single learners with different L1
- Lack of learner patience
- Coping with different ethnic groups with different values
- Achieving progress with older learners
- Difficulties in completing tasks outside classroom
Effective strategies & qualities

* Teaching strategies and skills
  * Constant revision of previous learning to consolidate skills & knowledge
  * Varying teaching strategies according to needs and skills of learner
  * Ready access to support in L1 with BLTs, esp. very low-level learners
  * Importance of everyone experiencing success by pitching teaching at the right level
  * ‘Seizing the moment’, being responsive, looking for opportunities to maximise learning with individuals
  * Approach tasks from different ways (e.g. using pictures, speech and words) to ensure relevance; re-phrase and re-present if not successful
  * Value of a cycle of modelling/acting/role-play/re-cycle/reflection/practise in pairs
  * Ensuring that learners with a common language can work together
Effective strategies & qualities

* Teaching content
  * Learners have right ‘learning blocks’ to build higher levels of learning
  * Relevance of teaching content using ‘realia’ of everyday life tasks & issues
  * Importance of teaching all four literacy skills
  * Importance of basic sight words, with some taught every day
  * Phonics, especially for low-level learners
  * Dictation with all levels

* Rote practice of oral skills, especially with very low level learners to ensure they have a solid foundation of key foundation skills
Effective strategies & qualities

- Teacher qualities
  - Patience
  - Understanding that learners’ previous trauma can be played out in the classroom
  - ‘being human’ and de-mystifying the ‘teacher as expert’
- Teacher development
  - Need for on-going professional development, including BLTs
- Learning environment
  - Creating and sustaining a welcoming, supportive environment
  - Careful grouping of learners within the classroom to ensure that cultural values are respected and not threatened
Effective strategies & qualities

* Interpersonal relationships
  * Importance of believing they can succeed (self-efficacy) through praising achievement
  * Showing respect for learners in terms of their age (esp. older men), religion and culture
  * Understanding that learners’ previous trauma can be played out in the classroom - constant headaches, difficulties in concentrating on tasks, on-going health issues

* Outside the classroom
  * The need to practise new skills outside the classroom
  * Field-trips to significant national sites
  * Pastoral care for issues outside the classroom


Questions?

Comments?

Where to from here?